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THE OLD GATEWAY



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"They had left the old chapel now, and went together up the flag path to the gate at the side of the house."

THE OLD GATEWAY;

OR,

THE STORY OF AGATHA.



BY

EMMA MARSHALL,

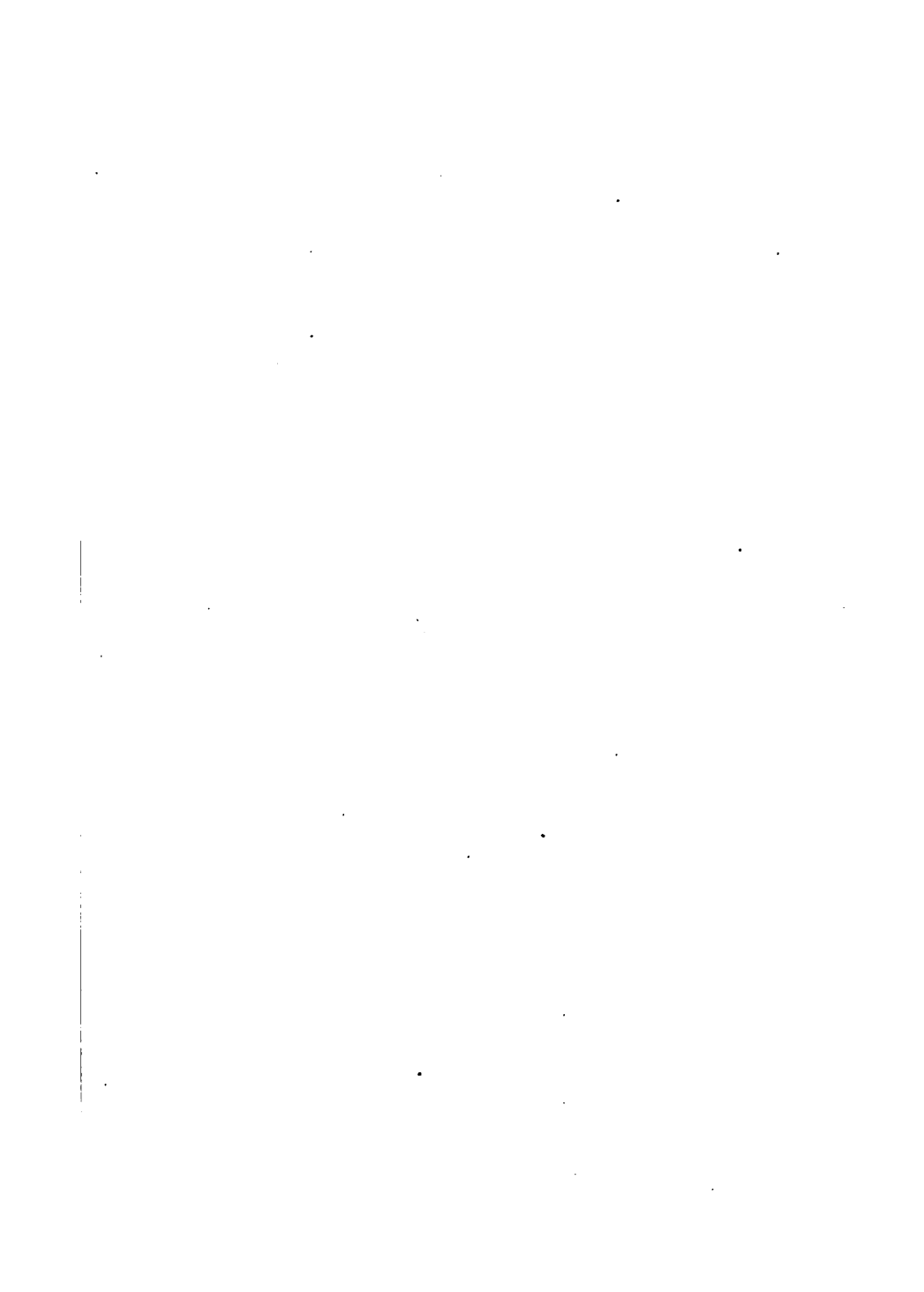
AUTHOR OF "BROTHERS AND SISTERS," "HELEN'S DIARY,"
"MILLCENT LEGH," ETC.

"The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in."—

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THE OLD GATEWAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST FLIGHT.

"I see my way as birds *their* trackless way.
I shall arrive! What time, what circuit first,
I ask not.

In some time—His good time, I shall arrive.
He guides me and the birds—in His good time."

R. BROWNING'S *Paracelsus*.

"I THINK we are very fortunate to have let this house to such good tenants as the Fawcetts," Mr. Harrison said, as he threw himself back in his chair by the fire, one chilly October evening. "Let me see. This day fortnight we shall be all off, I suppose; and it will be many a long day before we sleep under this roof again. It is a new fashion to let one's house to strangers. What would my grandfather have thought of it? But times are changed; and if one burns one's fingers in these detestable railways, they help one

to turn one's back upon the whole concern, quickly and cheaply. Still, I know I shall hate life abroad. What on earth shall I do with myself?"

Mrs. Harrison had listened to a similar expression of her husband's views so often during the last three months, that she had really nothing new to say in reply. But she turned from the writing-table where her pen had been busy for some time, and seating herself opposite her husband, took out her tating and showed signs of being inclined to talk. Mr. Harrison was a stalwart man, strong-limbed, and considerably above the average size in height and breadth. His wife was small and slender, a little woman, who held her ground by tact and manœuvre, who schemed and plotted for the mere love of it, and delighted to feel her way through a maze of policy, which was often to be admired for the talent it displayed, though never to be respected. Her husband did not attempt to understand her, or to combat her wishes after his first hasty dissent from them; he had learned how useless it was to combat a point with his wife; and, good-tempered and impulsive, he had often to acknowledge she was in the right and he was in the wrong, and that he would be like a pilotless ship without her. Country squire as he was,

with a pretty estate, and well-built, family mansion, he had aspired to increase his floating capital by speculation ; the result of this was that he had lost so much money that some retrenchment was necessary, and Mrs. Harrison seized upon the emergency to give her daughters the advantages of foreign masters, and half persuaded herself she should succeed by a residence abroad in effecting what seemed hopeless at home, namely, the transformation of two singularly ungraceful and unrefined girls into elegant and self-possessed women. Just as the heir of Shadrington Court took after his lady mother, and was all that she delighted in, so the two daughters resembled their father, and seemed a copy, almost a photograph, of him. His great burly frame, his loud voice, his abrupt impetuous manner, his good nature, his straightforward honesty, were all reproduced in Beatrice and Victoria Harrison.

“ Mother,” Eustace Harrison had said, when on his last visit at home, “ how is it the girls are so unlike you ? ”

And she replied, with a fond admiring glance at the finely cut, regular features of her only son, whose voice was so well modulated, and whose manner and bearing were so perfect that it was

almost provoking, "Ah, Eustace, if Beatrice were only like you! Poor, dear, awkward Bee! but she will tone down; few women attain anything like grace of manner till they are twenty, and Bee is scarcely eighteen; remember that, and remember what a neighbourhood this is, and how few advantages she has had."

"Yes, but Agatha has had precisely the same for eight or nine years, and she is very different. I think any one who saw the three girls together for the first time, would say Agatha was your daughter, and Beatrice and Victoria your nieces."

"Agatha Moore is not my niece, Eustace; her father was my first cousin, nothing more. There was no relationship to call for the act of kindness we exercised when we took her under this roof. A home at Shadrington Court was the very last thing Agatha had any right to expect. It was your dear father's generous nature which prompted him to bring her here, poor little thing, and I would not regret it."

Eustace smiled. "No, mother mine, you have no reason. Like many of the kind deeds you have done, I think it will bring its reward."

Eustace spoke so decidedly that his mother's quick eye was fixed upon him. That very day the agreement for letting Shadrington Court to

Mr. Fawcett had been concluded. That very day the three years' residence abroad had been decided on, and now Mrs. Harrison internally made another decision. "Agatha must not go away with us, and I think I see how to manage it. Yes, I think I can manage it without much difficulty. At any rate I must try." It was very seldom that Mrs. Harrison failed in any scheme on which she had set her heart, and had her own reasons for carrying through; but she worked as all such people do work, silently, and few guessed what she was so carefully trying to bring to an issue. So in this case Agatha went on dreaming of her life abroad, of the sight of snowy mountains, and deep, still lakes; of cities with all their treasures of art, and which were henceforth to be to her something more than a name. She bought a sketch-book, poor child, and a little tin case of Winsor and Newton's moist colours. She filled her writing-case with thin paper on which to write a journal, and laid in a stock of pens, pencils, and brushes. She tried to wake Beatrice and Victoria into some kind of answering enthusiasm, and finding it hopeless withdrew into herself again; only coming out for a few short delightful days when her cousin Eustace paid a fortnight's visit to Shadrington, and seemed, after

years of mere acquaintance, inclined to set up a friendship with her. "It is because Miss Francis is gone, and I am free from the school-room," Agatha thought. And oh! how enchanting was the idea of sketching with Eustace on the banks of Como, or listening to the music with him under the dome of St. Peter's, or of looking up in the Dresden Gallery into the face of the dark-eyed Madonna, with the two angels beneath, the photograph from which picture Eustace himself had given her. For poor Agatha was very tired sometimes of her life at Shadrington. The incessant round of lessons, the dull evenings in the drawing-room, where, if there had been a dinner-party, she sat with Miss Francis in a corner, and saw the same faces perpetually gathered as guests at Mr. Harrison's house, and heard the same light unmeaning talk, and listened to the same songs, and show-pieces played by the daughters of all the neighbouring county magistrates who exchanged the dreary ceremony of a dinner with Mr. Harrison at stated intervals. She was very tired of it all sometimes. She felt that she and poor Miss Francis were alike homeless in Shadrington Court. Beatrice and Victoria were dressed with care on these great occasions, and Mrs. Harrison's maid did her best

with their hair ; they were called by their mother to talk to her friends, to play their last new piece of music, to show their drawings perhaps ; and when the gentlemen appeared they were still allowed to remain in the foreground of the picture, while Miss Francis and Agatha understood their place was at the side-table where the photograph books lay, and where there was that great transparency with a wax candle behind it, every line and every shadow of which Agatha-knew by heart.

Sometimes, but not often, one of the company would approach this proscribed territory, and try to talk to Mrs. Harrison's quiet little niece, and see what she was like ; and latterly, when a Canon of Northborough Cathedral and his wife had dined at Shadrington, a bright-eyed, merry girl, his daughter, had always come to speak to Agatha. Susan Cavendish had taken a fancy to Agatha, so she would say to her father, as they drove four drowsy miles home, and on the principle which made her pet and notice whoever and whatever was snubbed and neglected, Susan turned over in her mind various schemes for getting at Agatha ;—but she had failed so often. If she asked Agatha to a croquet party, or any little diversion which befitted a girl of fifteen or sixteen, her cousins came, but she never did.

And Mrs. Cavendish, who was very much of the same type as Mrs. Harrison, never aided poor Susan in her efforts, so they seemed to languish and fail. But, nevertheless, Susan was an object of great interest to Agatha. She liked to fancy what her large tribe of sisters were like, and above all, she craved to know the invalid brother whom Susan would sometimes mention with a sigh, lying imprisoned on his couch, day after day, year after year, and who liked to be read to and talked to, but cared for scarcely anything else in the world.

Such had been Agatha Moore's life almost since she could remember, not quite: for she had memories, somewhat dim and hazy, of a pretty parsonage she once called home, of her mother's loving voice, her father's tender accents. But that was but as a gleam of light far far away on the road she had travelled since; that straight, even road which looked so precisely the same as she turned her gaze backward, except where the sunshine of her early childhood lay across the beaten track long ago. But the young do not turn their eyes behind them as the old do. The future, the unknown shadowy future, has the charm for them, and it had seemed to Agatha lately that the long sameness of her life was ending, and that she was to step out into a very different road, where

snow-crowned mountains and laughing valleys, dancing waters and deep blue lakes, grand old cathedrals, time-honoured treasures of art, and places teeming with historic interest were mingled together in a motley but inviting group. Away from the dull routine of Shadrington Court, the village bounded by its green sloping hills—away from the school-room where all the surroundings were useful and nothing was ornamental; away from all this! Agatha's heart beat fast at the thought, and she went on with her little preparations, spending upon them much of her small stock of pocket-money, and wholly unprepared for what was before her. Away from Shadrington, indeed, but where?

As Mrs. Harrison's fingers play with the small ivory shuttle, which she plies with such skilful celerity that it is hard to believe she effects anything by the almost imperceptible movement, she begins to lay open her scheme for Agatha's future to her husband. But, first, she lets him go over all his own affairs—his doubts as to the expediency of the proposed plan, his hope that every effort will be made to be economical. "If not," he is saying, "if not, Anna, we really may as well stay here. It is quite as easy to run through money abroad as at home, you must know that."

“Of course I do, dear Robert; and I need not go over all I have said so often about the saving to be effected by a life out of England for a time; no entertainment of friends, no expenses of horses, no large establishment to keep afloat. But I have thought that it was right to economize in *every* way, and so you will be glad to hear what I have done for Agatha Moore.”

“Eh, for Agatha; what has she to do with it?”

“Do not be impatient, and I will tell you,” said Mrs. Harrison, calmly. “I do not really think it is right for me to impose upon you the burden of a distant relation at this time. Of course, when dear Bee comes out, Agatha must come out too. There would be endless expenses in the matter of dress, and so forth.”

“Why, Anna, the poor child pays her own way. The money comes into my hand half-yearly that her father left her; and if it did not, the child would be welcome to share and share alike with my own girls.”

“That is so like your generous, unselfish nature, Robert; but I could not allow you to do anything just now which would be a needless expense. Poor Agatha’s money—fifty pounds a year——”

“Sixty,” corrected Mr. Harrison.

“Ah, sixty, is it? Well, how far would that go towards her travelling expenses for one thing; and if we winter in Rome, or Dresden, next year, how far would it go towards dressing a girl of nineteen, who must appear as your daughter should, if she went into society with us.”

“I tell you, Anna, for the hundred and fiftieth time,” said Mr. Harrison, getting angry, he scarcely knew why, “I am not going into society, as you call it, at all. That is just the reason I am leaving this comfortable home, because abroad, they tell me, you can do as you please, and avoid expenses which a man in my position at home cannot well get out of. But if you are planning for all sorts of extravagances, and dressing up the girls to trot them out before a heap of foreign counts and gambling barons, why we had better back out of our agreement with the Fawcetts, and stay where we are. Upon my word, Anna, you are very unreasonable.”

It was curious how calmly Mrs. Harrison bore this outbreak. She quietly picked up the *Times*, which, in his excitement, Mr. Harrison had thrown on the hearth-rug, and went on developing her plans in the most deliberate way.

“I felt so strongly, Robert, that Agatha

Moore could not go abroad with us, that some days ago I wrote to a relation on her mother's side—as near as I am on her father's—Mrs. Hope. I knew I was really doing her a kindness in asking if she could arrange to receive Agatha for the three years of our residence abroad. Mrs. Hope is very poor, and she and a brother, I think, live together, because their united means just help them to pull through. A lonely, solitary sort of life they lead, I fancy, in Devonshire; and it is just as I expected, Mrs. Hope writes as if she were quite thankful to accept my proposition. Here is her letter, you can read it. 'St. Mary's Farm, near Havensmouth.' Or shall I read it to you?"

"No, I am not blind, and this is the hand of a sensible woman; and a very sensible and well-expressed letter it is," he said, as he finished it. "But pray how many have passed between you and this Mrs. Hope?"

"One or two. I have been so anxious to settle the dear child pleasantly; and I do think I have succeeded. Indeed, it will be much better for her, and I feel that with no governess three girls of eighteen and seventeen would be too much for me. Since Miss Francis left us I have felt this even at home; in travelling it would be worse."

“Have you told the child herself?”

“No,” said Mrs. Harrison, with the look of one who felt the most disagreeable part of her mission was to come. “No, there is plenty of time, but I mean to tell Agatha my intentions to-morrow, or perhaps to-night, when she comes home.”

“Where are the girls?”

“They are gone to spend the evening at the Vicarage with Miss Willmott. I told you that before.”

“Well, I think you might have consulted me, Anna, before you took this step; and I can tell you, if I had been consulted, I should have found out what Agatha wished herself before I handed her over like poor Rough, there, to strangers.”

Rough, hearing his name, awoke from his nap and dreams of chasing brown rabbits in the plantations, and stood erect and gazed into his master's face with earnest eyes.

“Yes, Rough, poor fellow, you are to winter at the Vicarage with the parson and his sister. You have not been consulted either, have you, Roughie?”

And Rough, unable to understand completely a speech which he nevertheless knew concerned him, went through a series of antics and evolutions at his master's feet, and finally ended by

sitting up on his hind paws, and begging with his front ones in the most approved fashion.

“Poor Roughie,” said his mistress, who had risen to make the tea, and who now dropped a piece of sugar from the tongs, which she had held suspended over her cup, into Rough’s mouth, the dog catching it and crunching it up with a satisfied gesture. “Poor Roughie, he deserves a bit of sugar for begging. Now lie down, like a good little doggie.”

Rough obeyed for the time; his curiosity was allayed. And Rough’s was not the only excitement which Mrs. Harrison knew how to quiet by sweet morsels. She knew how to dispense bonbons, and to administer them at the right moment. And after a little more conversation with Mr. Harrison, while she supplied him with three cups of the strongest and best tea, she managed to persuade him that it was an excess of generosity in him to have kept Agatha at Shadrington Court so long, to have given her such an excellent education, to have trained her in the customs and usages of good society; and that she, Mrs. Harrison must ever be grateful for such unexampled kindness extended to her poor cousin Herbert Moore’s orphan child.

The soothing influence of his wife’s well-timed

flattery had, together with the tea, almost changed Mr. Harrison's views about Agatha's being despatched, on the 20th, to St. Mary's Farm, when the great bell of the hall door sounded, and just as the clocks in the house chimed ten, the drawing-room door opened, and the three girls entered. Beatrice led the way, tossing her hat and cloak upon a chair, and throwing herself upon the hearth-rug, she pulled Rough towards her, and began to fondle and play with him, saying :—

“ Mr. Willmott walked home with us, mamma ; it is as dark as pitch out of doors.”

Meanwhile, Victy—as she was commonly called—perched upon the arm of her father's chair, and embraced his head in very much the same rough way as her sister had seized upon the dog's.

“ Dear dad,” she said, “ have you heard whether any Miss or Master Fawcett wants Daphné ; it will break my heart if she is sold, and it will be a thundering shame.”

“ My darling child, where *do* you pick up such expressions ? And, oh, Victoria ! look at your gown, my dear. What have you done to it ? ”

“ Miss Willmott was busy making black-berry syrup and jelly, when we got to the Vicarage, mamma, and it was such fun ; she let

me help her. But I spilt a lot all over myself, because I filled the flannel bag, the stuff is strained through, too full, and it all ran over. Mamma, did you know jelly was strained through a flannel bag? It rather sets my teeth on edge when I think of it."

"We were not in the kitchen, mamma," said Beatrice, seeing that her mother looked shocked at Victoria's history of the blackberry jelly. "We were only in Miss Willmott's little room, where she cooks up all the nice things for the poor people. She was quite sorry she was not dressed when we got there at six o'clock; but these blackberries had come in late. She had paid some of the school children twopence a pint for gathering them, and the dear old thing was so afraid they would be spoiled if she kept them till to-morrow, and the cook had sprained her wrist."

"Well, dear child, I think we have had quite a leaf out of a cookery-book. What else have you done at the Vicarage?"

"Had a glorious heavy tea, mamma, at seven o'clock, as usual, and I played backgammon with Mr. Willmott, and Agatha and Victoria looked over that book of foreign photographs Mr. Willmott told you he had got; and then,

oh! I don't know, we laughed and talked, and were as merry as crickets, as Mr. Willmott said."

"Yes," said Agatha, speaking for the first time, and the tones of her singularly musical voice seemed the more melodious, after her cousin's loud, high-pitched rattle; "yes, we were very happy, Aunt Anna. There was a beautiful photograph of Milan Cathedral, and oh! such a lovely one of Como, taken from Cadenabbia, the place which looks across the lake, to all the beauties of Bellaggio. You said we should see the Italian lakes next summer, did you not?"

Mrs. Harrison did not answer; but that was no uncommon thing when Agatha spoke. The gong sounded for prayers, the old butler threw open the door, and the whole party went into the hall, where a blazing fire was burning on the open hearth, and where Mr. Harrison read, in rather a sleepy voice, one of the Psalms for the Evening, and then two or three collects, and then it was over. The servants retired, the fire was put out, "good-nights" were exchanged, and very soon the house was still and quiet. Only the old clock on the stairs ticking its ceaseless story—"Never, for ever; for ever, never!" Only the occasional barking of one of the watch dogs,

the sighing of the autumn wind through the elm-trees, and the tap of a withered leaf against the casement.

Agatha slept alone in a small room on the same floor as her cousins. She was sitting on a little low chair, bending over a small fire, her chestnut hair falling in great masses over her slight figure; her hands clasped upon her knees, and her eyes fixed upon the dying embers.

She was dreaming of the future which lay before her, and of the great change which was at hand, when a light knock at her door made her spring up.

“Come in, Bee.”

For sometimes Beatrice would creep out of her room into Agatha's and have ten minutes' talk, after Victoria had gone to sleep. Many a time had poor Miss Francis interrupted their little conversations in days past; but though her figure at the door, in a curious striped wrapper, always struck the girls with a sense of awe, it was nothing to what Agatha felt at this moment, when, bearing a little silver candlestick in her hand, Mrs. Harrison appeared, in the most *recherché* of white dressing-gowns, in the prettiest of caps, with pink ribbon, her small feet encased in the daintiest of slippers.

“My dear Agatha,” she began, “I wanted to have a little quiet talk with you. Sit down again, dear. Thank you,” as Agatha pushed a little green baize-covered hassock to her aunt. “Are there any more coals?” and while Agatha, finding a solitary lump at the bottom of the coal-box, put it on the fire, Mrs. Harrison was gathering her forces. “You know, Agatha, that some pecuniary difficulties have obliged Mr. Harrison to let Shadrington Court for three years. He and I are quite decided that every unnecessary expense must be curtailed, and as every additional person *does* increase the expense of travelling very much, we have felt that it would be better for you, dear child, to accept the offer made by a relation of your dear mother’s, and remain under her roof while we are away. If brighter times dawn, and we return to dear, happy Shadrington, you, my love, will be welcomed amongst us as a daughter once more.”

She took one of Agatha’s small hands in hers, and, trying to draw her nearer, bent towards her to kiss her; but Agatha drew back.

“I do not understand,” she said, as if bewildered. “What relation of my mother’s do you mean? how did she ——? I mean, why did she ask me to go to her? I had *far* rather stay with

you," she added, passionately; and then correcting herself with her wonted truthfulness, she said, with a gasp, "I did so want to go to Italy."

"And I am sure we wanted to have you, darling," said Mrs. Harrison; "but I know you are too unselfish, and see things in too just a light, to think we mean anything but kindness in our decision. Robinson may manage to wait on me and Beatrice and Victoria, but she could not possibly pack and arrange for *four* ladies. A second maid is out of the question, and I have told Harriet so. She feels very much leaving us; but all these changes are inevitable, alas!"

"I can do everything for myself, Aunt Anna. Harriet scarcely waits on me at all. I——" and then Agatha stopped.

"Ah, dear child, you have never been accustomed to travelling, and you don't know the miseries of it. Besides, there is the actual expense of tickets and hotels. How grieved I am to be obliged to say that is a great object to us now: it was not so a year ago, Agatha; and I always looked forward to bringing you out and dressing you exactly as I should my own child. The change is a trying one to me; you will not make it more so by vain regrets."

Agatha had no more to say. She felt Mrs. Harrison had the game in her own hands. She was to have no part or lot in this residence abroad. She was to be sent, whether she liked it or not, to live with strangers. She neither moved or spoke again while Mrs. Harrison was in the room. She heard her speak of that day week as the date of her departure, of a probable escort as far as London, and of the safety of a ladies' carriage, when once on the direct line to Havensmouth. She heard, too, a faint outline of Mrs. Hope, and her position, and her relationship given, the beauty of the climate and neighbourhood of Havensmouth dwelt upon, and she heard the last words,

“ I doubt not you will be very happy, dear,” in Mrs. Harrison's sweetest, softest tones, and she received a succession of kisses which were meant to be most affectionate, in utter silence, scarcely returning the embrace, or resisting it; and then Mrs. Harrison had taken up the pretty candlestick again, and softly closing the door, was gone!

Agatha stood as her aunt had left her for some minutes; then she mechanically gathered up her hair, and made her final preparation for the night, kneeling down for a few minutes, as

was her custom, but unable even to repeat the form of prayer which was at all times only said as a matter of ceremony, and from habit. She felt, poor child, too heart-frozen and chilled to cry. All her bright visions were dispelled, crumbled away at a touch. She was alone and forlorn, and desolate. She was going to leave them all, as Miss Francis had left them, and she was in reality no more to the Harrisons than a governess had been—not so much, perhaps. Beatrice would miss her a little, she thought, and her uncle, who was always good-tempered, and in his way, so kind to her; but they would soon forget her in the varied life before them. And then the poor little heart dwelt with bitterness on the thought of Susan Cavendish in her happy home, and of many other girls she knew by sight and name, who had the love of father and mother, brothers and sisters, surrounding them every day and every hour, while she was an orphan, bandied about at the will of others, not even consulted as to whether she would like to go to Havensmouth or not; letters written about her which she did not see; all her future mapped out for her—and she must resign herself to it.

“I had rather be a governess,” she said aloud

at last, "than go where I am not wanted. And I will be a governess if I am not happy with these people. I can please myself about that, and there is no one to consult—because no one cares much," she added, "what I do. Perhaps—perhaps, Uncle Robert may be sorry, and Bee and Victoria will miss me. But Eustace—I wonder if he knows what Aunt Anna has done with me. I wonder what he says. I wonder——" and with these questions softer feelings came, and then at last a burst of tears, such as we can only shed at seventeen, and Agatha cried herself to sleep.

In the next few days, busy with preparation, and in the excitement of every one around her, Agatha lost the first sting and bitterness of her disappointment.

Mrs. Harrison gave her one of her capacious travelling trunks, which was filled with her wardrobe, and to do Mrs. Harrison justice, everything was nice and appropriate. The box stood in a room with the new ones lately come down from London, fitted with every convenience for travelling, bound with leather, and bright with brass knobs, with the proper initials on the box itself, and on its stout leather cover.

The maids were incessantly occupied at

these boxes, and the rest of the family was in that state of preparation and bustle which those who have let their houses furnished will understand very well. Favourite ornaments were locked away; inventories had to be taken, by competent people; and an exact description of the state of carpets, curtains, etc., that any injury might be the more easily detected when Mr. Harrison returned to Shadrington.

“I cannot think what we shall do without you, Agatha,” Beatrice would say; “who will help me with that horrid German? and find my lost property a dozen times a day, and save me from getting into scrapes with mamma? Oh, Agatha, I never knew I cared half as much about you as I do now you are going away from us.” Victoria would end with—“It is just like Miss Francis leaving us; how often have I wished to see the last of her little sharp, thin face, and yet, when it actually came to that, I cried because I could not help it.” And thus these out-spoken, kindly girls gave Agatha many a pang. “They care for me because I have been of use to them,” she would think sadly; “poor Miss Francis and I were always alike in this house. It is really nothing new, only it is very hard.”

The last morning came, and the large box stood

ready in the wide hall, and the carriage was at the door. With a pale, calm face, Agatha received Mrs. Harrison's fervent embrace, and Beatrice and Victoria's often-repeated kisses, mingled with many tears, for Victoria was quite unable to control herself, and sobbed aloud. The servants also gathered together to bid little Miss Moore good-bye; and Rough, and a great retriever, Bruno, stood by, looking their mute farewell.

Agatha stooped down and laid her cheek against Rough's shaggy coat—

“Poor Rough, good-bye.”

“Come, my dear—come, Agatha, it will never do to miss the train at Layton. What will Mrs. Ponsonby think? Come, my dear;” and taking the little cold hand in his, Mr. Harrison led Agatha away.

She had pictured this departure from Shadrington many times—the beginning of a bright, delightful life, full of fresh interest and variety; for, as Mrs. Harrison truly said, Agatha knew nothing of the discomforts of travel, and dwelt only on the bright side of the picture; and this was the end of all her dreams.

“She is a very peculiar girl; poor dear Agatha!” said Mrs. Harrison. “How quietly

she took leave of us. My dear Beatrice, pray do not give way so to your feelings; you are so warm-hearted and demonstrative. Victoria, have you settled about the jacket like your travelling dress? The pattern you tried on was much too tight. What a wretched day it is! I do hope we shall have a brighter morning for our start this day week." And then Mrs. Harrison turned herself to the business of the day, exceedingly well satisfied that she had accomplished her wishes about Agatha so easily, and with no opposition from any one.

Meantime, the carriage rolled on towards Layton, the small railway station within two miles of Shadrington, where Agatha was to be put under the care of Mrs. Ponsonby. It was, as Mrs. Harrison said, a wretched day of fog and drizzle, through which the yellow leaves drifted slowly to the damp ground.

"Well, my dear," Mr. Harrison was saying, "I am very sorry to lose you, as I told you the other day—very sorry. Nothing but the crippled condition these detestable railways, and other companies, have left me in, would have made me consent to part with you; but you won't forget us, Agatha, you won't forget us?" and putting his arms round the small figure at his side, Mr.

Harrison pressed her close. He remembered how he had brought her, in her black frock, years ago, to Shadrington, and how she had held up her small face to his to be kissed, saying,

“Uncle Robert, you are very kind to me; I will try to be good.” Now she laid her head upon his shoulder, and said,

“Thank you so much for all you have done for me. I can never forget how kind you have always been, and I dare say it is better for me to go. Aunt Anna might have found me in the way, and——” Agatha’s voice failed, and in her efforts to repress her tears, she scarcely heard Mr. Harrison’s protestations, that he wished to his heart the thing could be undone—that he had not been consulted—that if Agatha were unhappy she was to write to him, and he would come for her to Havensmouth—that she was to write to Bee and Vic, and never forget that if ever they returned to Shadrington, it was her home; and she was to come back and be like a daughter to him once more.

Finally, he put into her hand a little purse, with just enough pocket-money, he said, to keep her going for a few months. No, she was not to thank him, she would want it; as Mrs. Hope was poor, the whole of her income would be needed

by her, no doubt. Glyn and Mills had had orders to pay in the dividend half-yearly to Mrs. Hope, he had written and explained that; and here the carriage stopped at the station, and the train was heard coming up. There was barely time to get Agatha's ticket to London, to see her boxes labelled, and to hurry her into the carriage where Mrs. Ponsonby's face was seen at the window.

"Mr. Harrison, how do you do? How do you do, Miss Moore?" and Agatha stumbled past Mrs. Ponsonby on one side, and a stout old gentleman, with heaps of rugs and wraps and newspapers on the other.

"Mr. Harrison, I am not going further than Torminster, you know; it will be past eight when we get there, I am afraid; but Norton will put Miss Moore into a ladies' carriage for Havensmouth. Oh! Mr. Harrison, would you ask him if the small trunk was labelled at Northborough; I have my misgivings; Norton gets so bewildered in travelling. A valuable creature at home, but in travelling—*Norton!*" All this time, Mrs. Ponsonby was leaning out of the window, much to the ill-suppressed wrath of the gentleman who was her *vis-à-vis*, and, much to Agatha's vexation, who could not get the last look she longed for of her uncle's face.

“Good-bye, Uncle Robert, good-bye!” for the train began to creak and move, and, with a sudden impulse, as Mrs. Ponsonby sank back in her seat, Agatha sprang forward, and held her face to the honest, kindly one of her early friend for a parting kiss. A fervent pressure of the hand, and a murmured “God bless you!” and then Mr. Harrison relaxed his hold of the small fingers resting on the window ledge, and the little dove was sent forth on its flight over the waters of this troublesome world. Alone and desolate she felt—and Mrs. Ponsonby’s sharp shutting of the heavy window, and expression of relief that they were fairly off, was unnoticed. So also were the stout gentleman’s frantic efforts to rescue his *Punch* from the chaos beneath Mrs. Ponsonby’s rugs and his own. Agatha turned away her face to the friendly arm which divided her from the next seat, and the long-repressed tears found vent at last.

“Dear me, how very disagreeable,” thought Mrs. Ponsonby. “I do hope she won’t go on crying long, it makes me feel like a jailer with an escaped prisoner. Really I hope she won’t cry long, for the next station is Ebbor, and ten to one some of the Grevilles may get into the train, into this carriage perhaps, for the rest are full. I thought Susan Cavendish said the Harrisons

were not over-kind to her, she fancied; so this crying is great affectation—in public too. I dislike having girls put under my charge. I only did this to please Susan; and really, here we are at Ebbor, and there is, positively, Lady Harriet Greville—coming to this carriage, too.”

The door opened, and the lady in question entered quietly, and without making the least bustle, and took the seat next Agatha, nearest the window.

“Lady Harriet Greville,” said Mrs. Ponsonby, leaning forward.

“Mrs. Ponsonby, I think. Pray forgive my not recognizing you at first.”

“Oh dear, yes. One is taken by surprise in travelling. The General—General Ponsonby—was such a friend of your father’s, and I remember spending a charming morning at Raleigh Court with my relatives, the Cavendishes, two years ago; it was too delightful a day to forget. Miss Moore, will you be so good as to move to the other side? Thank you;” as Agatha obeyed; her tears had spent themselves now, and she sat quiet and self-possessed, conscious that Lady Harriet’s eyes were upon her, not with a curious, impertinent gaze, but with a sweetness of expression and interest, of which Agatha felt the charm.

Lady Harriet stemmed the torrent of Mrs. Pensonby's questions, and before very long that talkative lady began to discover that she had said enough. And then, after a long pause, Lady Harriet addressed Agatha—

“Are you going a long journey?”

“Yes, to Havensmouth, or near Havensmouth I ought to say,” she added, correcting herself.

“It is a beautiful neighbourhood. Mr. Greville has a shooting-box near Torminster; and when we are there I sometimes drive over to Havensmouth for a day or two. You are not going for health, I hope?”

“Oh, no. I am going to some relations to live with them,” Agatha said. “I have no real home now; my uncle, that is, Mr. Harrison, with whom I have lived, is going abroad for three years, and it is—it was—not convenient to them to take me with them.”

The trembling lip, and tremulous voice in which these answers were given, stopped Lady Harriet from saying any more; but Agatha's face strangely interested her, and before she left the carriage she put into her hand a small bunch of lovely flowers, and said—

“I am going to change here for Orchester;

will you have these flowers?" And then she added, "I hope you will have a pleasant journey, and be very happy at Havensmouth. Perhaps one day I may see you there."

"Thank you, thank you so much," was all Agatha could say; but the gently-expressed sympathy and the kind words had fallen like dew upon her soul, poor child. The flowers were counted as priceless treasures, and, dried and withered, were preserved for many and many a day.

Mrs. Ponsonby took even less notice of Agatha after Lady Harriet's departure, merely saying she was a very uncertain, strange person, and that the General had been a most intimate friend of her father's, and she had always heard she was peculiar.

And then Mrs. Ponsonby had recourse to her sandwich-basket and her travelling-case, and soon after resigned herself to sleep in her own corner, as the stout gentleman had done long ago in his; and Agatha was left to her own thoughts: these now dwelt very much on the sweet presence which had cheered her for a few minutes, and she wondered within herself if Lady Harriet Greville were as good and true as she was gracious, winning, and beautiful. Such a peaceful happy expression on her face, Agatha

thought; but then, she has everything in the world she can wish for, I dare say. Such people *must* be happy. And a strange yearning leaped up in Agatha's heart for a like lot in life — sunshine and flowers, and all beautiful things; an atmosphere of love to breathe, a power and a will to make others as happy as herself.

Agatha would have been very much surprised if she could have known that one who had left so deep an impression on her, was making her the subject of her thoughts as the train moved on to Orchester. .

“Poor child! how bitterly she was crying when I got into the carriage, and what an effort she made to control herself, and how intolerable was Mrs. Ponsonby's manner to her. I don't think she has many friends; she looked so desolate and forlorn. I wonder, oh! I wonder if she has the best Friend for her hope and stay. If not, may she find Him, and so find her rest.” And then there was sent up a “little winged messenger,” for Agatha, from a faithful loving heart, of which who can tell the worth.

Some of us are so apt to complain of the little we can do for others; at least, we may always do this; at least, we may give the sorrowful a look of sympathy and interest, and we may pray for

"Will you have these flowers?" And then she added, "I hope you will have a pleasant journey, and very happy at Havensmouth. Perhaps one day we may see you there."

"Thank you, thank you so much," was Agatha could say; but the gently-expressed sympathy and the kind words had fallen like a warm blanket upon her soul, her child. The flowers were counted as precious treasures, and, dried without, were preserved for many and many a year.

Mrs. Punsenby took even less notice of Agatha after Lady Harriet's departure, merely saying she was a very uninteresting, strange person, and the General had been a most intimate friend of her father's; and she had always heard she was a

And then Mrs. Punsenby had recourse to her wicker-basket and her travelling-casement, and resigned herself to sleep in her room, as the stout gentleman had done up in his; and Agatha was left to her thoughts; these now dwelt very much upon the present which had cheered her minutes, and she wondered what the

happy for them, who have everything, yet who
will do us with love. I have seen their
eyes and their hearts. And in strange, glowing
and up to Agatha's house for a little while. I
saw and I saw, and all beautiful things,
a mixture of love and devotion, a power and a
will to make others as happy as herself.

Agatha would have been very much surprised
if she could have known that one who had felt
a deep and impression on her, was making her
the subject of her thoughts as she went
into the chamber.

"Poor child! how lately she was crying
when I got into the carriage, and with an effort
he made to control herself, and how ineluctable
was Mrs. Ponsbury's name to her. I don't think
she has many friends; she looked so desolate
and forlorn. I wonder, oh! I wonder if she has
any more friends for her love and sympathy. If not,
may she find them, and in find her own
heart. There was not up a "little while"
from a faithful friend in the
world.

the couple

and, wo

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the friendless that they may find their best Friend. As we pass along the highway of the world, countless are the Samaritan-like deeds of this silent and hidden sort which we may perform, seen by none, noticed by none, but which by and by may be known by their blessed fruits.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE GATEWAY.

"Dominus custodiat introitum tuum et exitum tuum."

THE drive through London was over, and the Paddington station reached, when Mrs. Ponsonby, having refreshed herself with her nap and her sandwiches, began to be more talkative, and, as she thought, agreeable to Agatha. She ordered Norton to secure seats in a through carriage to Havensmouth, and to be sure to see that Miss Moore's luggage was labelled for that place, and not for Torminster; and when they were once more seated, the good lady entertained Agatha with a long history of her numerous friends and acquaintances, of the brilliant society in which the late General had moved, and the multitude of field-officers with whom he had been on intimate terms. Mrs. Ponsonby's visit to Torminster was to one of these very dear old friends, who would take no refusal, and who liked

nothing better than to talk over old times with her.

Having exhausted the subject, Mrs. Ponsonby began to question Agatha about herself, and tried to draw from her that she was very unhappy at being sent to Havensmouth, but Agatha grew reticent and shy as Mrs. Ponsonby grew communicative and inquisitive; and to the last question, "Who is to meet you at Havensmouth, Miss Moore?" she drew from her little travelling-bag a letter, which she had almost forgotten, and referring to it, said—

"Mr. Bruce will meet me, thank you."

"Mr. Bruce, who is he? Is that letter from him, my dear? I understood your relative was a Mrs. Hope. I wonder what family Mr. Bruce belongs to. The General was very intimate with a lineal descendant of the great hero, Captain Bruce; but, I remember, he fell at Delhi. Here we are at Ploughton. I dare say I shall see some one I know on this platform."

Agatha fervently hoped she might do so, and turning over her letter, began at the beginning and read it through once more, trying, as she did so, to bring before her the image of the writer. It was a clear round, almost childish, hand. There could be no difficulty in reading a single word. The ex-

pression, too, was homely and what is called matter-of-fact. There was no great profession of interest, and yet just enough cordiality to redeem the letter from coldness. "I could have wished," the letter ended, "that you had written to us to tell us whether you really thought you could be happy with us. We are not grand people; and after your life at Shadrington, life with us will, I think, seem very different. But I remember your mother, and I loved her; let this be a tie between us. Roland, my brother, will meet the mail train at nine, at Havensmouth, on Thursday evening. I dare say you will soon find each other out. I am, yours sincerely, GRACE HOPE."

Agatha folded the letter, replaced it in its envelope, and sighed. Still, she thought, it is better than a string of sweet words which mean nothing. And just at this moment Mrs. Ponsonby withdrew from the window, and Agatha turned to look out upon the platform. Mrs. Ponsonby had been disappointed in her search in that mixed throng of comers and goers, which had now nearly dispersed. There was no familiar face to her amongst them. But as Agatha looked out with that sort of absent glance by which we see the outward form and semblance of things and people, without any real impression being

made, she started, and the colour came to her cheeks. In another moment a gentleman advanced to the carriage, and had he ever allowed himself to be surprised into showing any astonishment, a hasty exclamation would have been uttered now. But it was only—

“How do you do, Agatha? Where are you going? Where is my mother? Surely,” he added, glancing into the carriage, “you are not travelling alone?”

“I am under Mrs. Ponsonby’s care,” said Agatha. “I am going to Havensmouth.”

“We start on the 27th, only a week hence; you must make a short visit.”

“Do you not know, Eustace, that I am not going with you at all? Aunt Anna has sent me to Mrs. Hope, to live with her for three years. Don’t you know all about it?”

But the answer was never destined to reach Agatha’s ears. Neither was Mrs. Ponsonby’s request, “Introduce me to Mr. Harrison, Miss Moore,” to meet with any response. The whistle sounded, the train moved on, and Eustace Harrison lifted his hat, smiled and bowed, and so vanished from Agatha’s sight.

He cares no more, not so much, as the others do, she thought, and the bitter, chilled feeling again asserted itself.

“What a very handsome man Mr. Harrison is, Miss Moore; just a little below the proper height. But then, soldiers’ wives always think so much of height. Such good features, and a perfect beard. Has he any profession?”

“He has read for the bar since he left Oxford,” Agatha answered; “but he is not very strong, and this winter he will spend abroad.”

“Ah, and with such a fine property coming to him, he need not read hard, or trouble himself about a profession, for this temporary embarrassment of Mr. Harrison’s will soon pass away, I suppose. How extremely stupid of Fowler; she has carried off the small air-cushion with her. I never can get any real rest without it, and as here are no fellow-travellers to amuse me, I must try to get a little sleep again. Fowler is very provoking.”

In spite of the absence of the air-cushion, Mrs. Ponsonby again sank into profound repose. At Torminster she awoke, somewhat bewildered and confused, and bidding Agatha a hasty good-bye, Mrs. Ponsonby was piloted by Norton and Fowler, who were laden with rugs and small etceteras, across the wide platform to a door, on the other side of which her friend’s carriage awaited her. Agatha watched her disappear in the gas-light,

then the train went on its way again, and Agatha was alone.

As Havensmouth was said to be within easy reach of Torminster, Agatha gathered up all her little possessions, and sat ready for her final destination. But the mail train had several stops yet to make; one at a little watering-place on the very brink of the water which lapped the base of the embankment, and to-night was sighing with a restless moan. Then on by the sea still, across which a light from a far-off coast twinkled, and the more steady radiance of a lighthouse shot across the gloom. Then on again, leaving the sea-side and darting inland once more; and then, after a curve, which followed the deep indentation of the coast, the sea again came in sight, then the bay round which Havensmouth sits like a queen on her many hills; and from her almost countless villas lights gleamed and twinkled, or were reflected from the harbour in the water in long streaks, or in concentrated brilliancy.

“Havensmouth,” said the guard; and opening the door of the ladies’ carriage where Agatha sat, courteously said, “Your luggage is all right, miss, I have seen it taken from the van; this is Havensmouth.”

Agatha still lingered on the step of the carriage, like a bird uncertain about taking flight.

"The train goes on, miss," said the kind guard, "we do not stay here more than two minutes. Shall I call a porter to show you to a fly?"

"Thank you," said Agatha, "I expected some one to meet me."

And her words attracted the attention of a tall man, whose height, in the dim light of the small station, looked to Agatha gigantic.

"Miss Moore, I think," Mr. Bruce said. "I have a conveyance here to take you to St. Mary's Farm. Will you show me your luggage?"

"Those two boxes and the carpet-bag are mine," Agatha answered, following Mr. Bruce to the place where her sole earthly possessions stood.

"That very large box, I am afraid, must wait here till to-morrow morning; we cannot take it with us, Philip," he continued, addressing a man in a stout blue coat, with buttons as large as small cheese-plates shining upon it.

"That there big' un, sir? Bless your heart, it would crush the trap all to pieces, that would; it's as big as a house."

And Philip took off his hat and rubbed his

forehead with a red pocket-handkerchief, as if to express his amazement. Mrs. Harrison's cast-off but commodious travelling-box was in truth of rather large proportions, but poor Agatha thought it never looked so large before as while this discussion was going on.

"The bus won't fancy coming down our lane this dark night," Philip resumed, "after they have dropped their passengers in Havensmouth; and let alone that, how yon box is to get in at the door when it gets to the house, passes my comprehension."

"Never mind, please," Agatha interrupted; "I can do very well without the box. I am sorry it is so large."

The weary, appealing voice struck Mr. Bruce.

"You must be tired," he said; "let me take you to the dog-cart. I hope you won't mind an open carriage."

Agatha felt as if she minded nothing now she was mounted safely, and covered with a rug. Then she heard Mr. Bruce giving directions to a porter about the unfortunate box. Old Philip secured the rest of the luggage on the back seat. The cloth was taken off the stout mare, and the dog-cart went swiftly along the smooth road

which wound round the bay. They were soon at Havensmouth, and having left the gas-lamps of the town behind them, far spread on every side was the glimmering of distant glowworm-like lights in the windows of the villas scattered over the crests of the hills.

“Havensmouth seems a large place,” Agatha said.

“Yes,” Mr. Bruce answered, “and will be yet larger; the houses spring up every day, like the one which Jack built. On either side of this steep road up which we are winding, for instance—now to all intents and purposes a street, there was not a single house some ten years ago. We say, there will soon be houses to be seen even from St. Mary’s Farm. I hope you are not cold,” Mr. Bruce added, kindly, “it is a raw damp night.” And as he spoke he pulled a wide scarf, which was tied round his chin, over his mouth. Mr. Bruce spoke with a slight Scotch accent, which was pleasant rather than otherwise, and he uttered his words slowly and deliberately, as is the wont of Scotchmen.

Very few words were exchanged between Agatha and her companion. The narrow lane of which old Philip had spoken was entered at last. Agatha could see nothing of its width or length,

for it was very dark, but it seemed interminable, and she heard the branches of the bushes scraping the sides of the cart, and even brushing her shoulder, and tapping her hat. After a good deal of jolting, they came to a halt. Philip clambered from his seat, and Agatha heard him mutter that it was "that dark he could not find the latch of the gate." But at last it was swung open, and then, after a few moments' drive on what almost seemed paved ground, Mr. Bruce said—

"We cannot drive round to the front of the house. Will you get down here? Ah, they are opening the door."

Guided by the light, which was shaded from the draught by a hand, Agatha, cold and tired, walked slowly towards it. As she reached the door a hand grasped hers, and a voice very like Mr. Bruce's, but with a stronger Scotch accent, said, "Come in, my dear, you must want rest and warmth, I am sure."

Mrs. Hope led her through a kitchen where a large fire was burning cheerily, up a long passage to a small sitting-room, where a white cloth was spread upon a table, and there were preparations for supper.

"Sit down in this easy chair," Mrs. Hope

said, "and let me take off your hat and cloak."

Agatha was really too worn out to make any resistance, and while the kindly hands busied themselves for her comfort, she kept silence. She was soon free from all her wraps; and Mrs. Hope, kneeling on the hearth-rug before her, looked up into the pale, young face, from which the wealth of brown hair was gathered, leaving its delicate outline clearly defined against the back of the dark leather chair, into which Agatha had sunk.

"My dear, you are faint and overdone," Mrs. Hope said presently; "you must have some wine directly." And in another minute she was holding a glass to the pale lips.

At that moment Mr. Bruce came in. Agatha was in his own peculiar chair, where no one but himself ever lounged. His slippers were displaced, and on the small table, where his books were piled, lay a little black hat with a pheasant's wing and a small glove.

"She is very faint, Roland," Mrs. Hope said. "My dear, try to drink this. You must," she added, almost authoritatively.

Poor Agatha made a desperate effort and swallowed the wine, but when she tried to raise herself and say she was better, the faintness came

over her, and she had to resign herself to the depths of the chair again.

Presently an elderly maid-servant came into the room with a covered dish in her hand, and having put it on the table, she said, "It is quite impossible, sir, for me to get the luggage up the stairs, and Philip, he's minding the horse; will ye please to come and help up with the box?" and casting a glance at the heap of wraps which lay about in the usually neat room, and snatching up the hat which had dared to lie on her master's books, Elsie said, "And I may just take these things upstairs too, one can't see across the room for 'em. Is the young lassie ill?" she abruptly inquired. "She looks as if a breath of the wind might blow her awa'," and growing more Scotch in her speech as she grew more open in her opinions, Elsie disappeared with an air and gesture that might imply if the wind did blow the new comer awa', she, Elsie, would not be much displeased.

"Poor old Elsie," said Mr. Bruce, "she proves the truth of the saying, 'that old servants become our masters;'" then removing the books from the small table, he said to Agatha, "We will bring your supper here to-night."

And though Agatha shook her head and said

she "could not eat anything," she did manage to taste the piece of roast fowl which was offered her, and thought she never ate anything better than the apple-tart and Devonshire cream. She was really suffering from hunger as well as fatigue; her sandwiches had been soon finished, and Mrs. Ponsonby had failed to see that it was so, and had not offered her anything from her inexhaustible basket. The supper revived her, and very soon she sat upright and said, "I am sorry I am giving so much trouble; I felt dizzy and faint when I first came in, but I am quite well now."

And then followed a few questions from Mrs. Hope about the journey and her travelling companions; and then Elsie appeared again, removing the supper and bringing in its place a large Bible and a hymn-book, which she placed at the head of the table; then she asked, "Prayers, I suppose, ma'am?"

"Yes, Elsie. Will you not like to go to bed?" Mrs. Hope said, turning to Agatha.

"Yes, please; I think I should." And this decision evidently did not raise Agatha in Elsie's opinion.

"Bring the candles, Elsie, and wait five minutes before you come in to prayers, while I show Miss Moore her room."

"It is past ten o'clock," Elsie murmured ; "I've sent the girl Jeanie to bed, and Philip is a-grumbling at being kept up."

Agatha bid Mr. Bruce good-night, and as she left the room he said to the old servant, who had known him from a child, "Why, Elspeth, you are not over courteous to our guest ; where is your North country hospitality, and what will she think of our manners ?"

"Think, 'deed, Master Roland ; and what may we think of a fine ladyish little thing with her boxes as big as houses, I hear, coming here, just planting herself down and 'specting to be waited on and seen after. I know it's no business of mine ; but, Master Roland, you will see that lassie is not of the same sort as you and the good mistress. I beg your pardon for giving my mind so plainly. We've managed to get the box up, so we won't be troubling you. It was a damp, raw night for you to be out so late, Mr. Roland ; Philip's a-waiting to go to bed, shivering and shaking like a water-rat."

Meanwhile Mrs. Hope was with Agatha in the room above, a long low room, with a deeply-recessed window, which showed the thickness of the wall, and above which ran a curious bit of oak carving ; a small fire burned in

a high old-fashioned grate, which did not throw out much heat. At one end stood the bed with heavy stuff curtains, at the other, a high circular dressing-table with many little drawers, on which stood a small looking-glass; two or three chairs and a sort of press completed the furniture of the room. Agatha's box and carpet-bag stood against the window.

"Shall I help you to unpack?" Mrs. Hope asked.

"Oh no, thanks," Agatha answered, slowly unfastening her bag and taking the key from the little pocket.

"But, my dear, you will be so long getting to bed without some help, I am afraid," said Mrs. Hope, who was all energy and spirit, and to whom Agatha's languid movements were even then trying.

"I shall get on very well, thank you." And then looking up into Mrs. Hope's face—that good, honest face—she said, "It seems like a dream to me. This day week I first heard of my aunt, Mrs. Harrison's, plan of sending me here."

"My dear, is it possible? Why, Mrs. Harrison had been writing to me on the subject for some time, we gathered from her letters that you wished very much to come to us, and when

you did not write to say so yourself, we were puzzled. Mrs. Harrison said——”

“I don’t want to hear what she said,” Agatha answered proudly; and now the hitherto calm face lighted with an expression which Mrs. Hope hardly understood. “Mrs. Harrison—I don’t think I shall ever call her aunt again—never liked me, and kept her scheme of getting rid of me hidden till the last, for fear any one should oppose it. If Mrs. Harrison dislikes me, the feeling is mutual. I hate her.”

“Agatha!” exclaimed Mrs. Hope, “it is not like a Christian to speak so. Good-night,” she added, after waiting for a moment to see if Agatha would soften what she had said. “Good-night, my dear, we breakfast at eight;” and, stooping down, she gave the trembling lips a grave kiss.

The expression of affection acted like a spell. Agatha threw her arms round her new-found relative, and said with childlike earnestness, “I hope you are not sorry to have me. I can go away again. I can be a governess, I can——”

“My dear child, you are welcome here. Your mother was my playmate and friend in early days; for her sake you are welcome, and——”

A sharp tap at the door, and the question put

in Elsie's voice, stopped all further communication just then. "Are ye wishing us, ma'am, to wait prayers for ye? it's wearing on to midnight."

Mrs. Hope hastily left the room, and Agatha was alone. As she sat before the fire, lost in her dream, there came a sound from beneath, of a rich, full-toned voice reading, to which the wind, as it moaned and sighed at the window-panes, seemed to keep up a sort of minor accompaniment. Then there was a pause, and then another voice, lower and less melodious, but earnest in the language of prayer and praise. Then there was a silence, and with the moaning of the wind there came a murmur, which Agatha knew must be the eternal chime of the restless waves.

Long after the footsteps of the little household had been heard retreating to their rooms—long after the quick spasmodic clock in the kitchen had struck eleven, and the midnight, old Elspeth had said, was wearing on, had really come—this child of seventeen summers sat, as Mrs. Hope had left her.

Then chilled and stiff with fatigue, she took from her box what was necessary for the night, and lay down in the heavy-curtained bed, and soon fell into a sound, dreamless sleep.

Prayers were over, and Mrs. Hope had made the coffee the next morning, and still no Agatha appeared.

"Did you call Miss Moore in good time, Elsie?" she asked of the old servant.

"At seven o'clock, ma'am," was the short answer.

"I dare say she is tired this morning, after her journey. She looks very delicate, Roland."

"Does she?" was the somewhat absent answer. "Shall I give you some ham, Grace?"

"Yes; I suppose we had better begin our breakfast. I hope in future she will be punctual, however. If one person is late, it upsets the household. Roland, do you think we have made a mistake? I fear the child looks as if she would never be happy with us."

"Old Elspeth and you have come to the same conclusion, it seems. But I decline giving an opinion, on such a short acquaintance with Miss Moore."

"Call her Agatha, Roland. It will make me feel as if she belonged to you as well as to me. I don't forget that the relationship is mine, not yours; and if the child's coming here should interfere with your comfort, I shall be so sorry."

Mr. Bruce smiled.

"Grace, I can hardly see how this child, as you irreverently call her, can interfere with my comfort. What with the farm, and my books, and writing, I shall not see much of her. But, Grace, I thought long ago we had settled that what was yours was mine, so completely had we cast in our lot together. We scarcely ever think or remember that our mothers were different, though our father's name was yours as well as mine. Why should Agatha Moore remind us of it?"

"Ah, Roland," she answered fondly, "you are always the same. But it seems hard," she continued, after a pause, "to understand why this child should have been sent here against her will, as I quite believe she was never consulted about it at all. I found that out last evening, and Mrs. Harrison's expressions of love and interest in her, it appears meant nothing. I am afraid they were very worldly people, Roland."

Mr. Bruce smiled.

Straightforward and honest herself, Mrs. Hope was slow to believe in the insincerity of others, and Mrs. Harrison's florid and romantic letters had deceived her.

"I have kept Mrs. Harrison's letters," Mrs.

Hope continued, "and I feel almost sure she said in one of them, that Agatha's heart yearned after me as a relation of her mother's, and she was charmed to take up her abode with us."

"No, Grace, I think I remember that letter, too. You will find both the verbs in the conditional mood, which makes some difference."

"Then Mrs. Harrison has been guilty of false representation. What can we hope, Roland, from a girl brought up by such a woman?"

"We must hope all things, even that she will come down to breakfast another morning before the coffee is cold. I must be off now. You will be glad to hear," he said, cheerfully, as he was leaving the room, "that the last flock of lambs have fetched a good price. The pasturage answers so much better than grain in these sloping fields, that I shall in another year turn up all the land for cattle."

"You are very clever in farming, as in everything else," she said, as the door closed, and the complimentary speech was lost upon her brother Roland.

When at last Agatha came downstairs, the little sitting-room was empty. The small metal coffee-pot was on the hob, and one cup, a roll, and some butter were on the table.

“I suppose I am very late,” she said, helping herself to her breakfast calmly and deliberately. “What an odd room this is, and only that square of grass in front to be seen from the windows, shut in by the old stone wall. I thought we should see the sea, or something pretty. How dull it is: it is like being shut up in a convent. I am sure those are ‘narrowing nunnery walls!’ What shall I do here all day, and every day for three years?”

She had finished her breakfast by this time, and began to explore the room. On the table where her hat had so offended Elspeth’s eyes last night, she saw a pile of books, and writing materials. The table stood in a recess by the fire, and the easy chair by it.

“These must be Mr. Bruce’s books,” she thought—“farmer’s magazines and treatises on cows and pigs.” But taking up the first of the heap, she opened it, and to her surprise saw it was a volume of Goethe. “German!” she exclaimed aloud; “and here is an Italian book, too, and a Greek Testament. And oh! extracts from Robert Browning. And that dull book of Dr. Darwin’s. Such heaps of paper, too, written over.” And replacing the books, Agatha stopped, for she was coming to what might be private property.

On the other side of the fire there was a similar deep recess, and here were Mrs. Hope's work-basket, and knitting, and one or two simple religious books. The name written in each, in the clear writing Agatha knew so well.

At the end of the room was a book-shelf, well stocked, and an old-fashioned sofa beneath. Then, opposite the fire, the two windows, with very small panes of glass, and thick frames, looking out on the grass, which was not very smoothly cut, and which ran the length of the house on this side, shut in by an old battlemented wall, overgrown with ivy, through which the grey coping was only just visible.

Exploring further, Agatha crossed a very narrow passage to a room opposite, like the one she had quitted in every respect, except that it did not look so much used, and was even less cheerful and pleasant. The long passage terminated in the kitchen, and here Agatha next found herself—a large cat, sunning herself by the open door, the only occupant.

“How fine it is!” was Agatha's next thought, as she saw the sunshine lying in broad patches on the roofs of the outbuildings. “As no one is here, I shall get my hat and go out.”

She was soon coming down the narrow stairs

again, ready for her walk ; and, passing out through the kitchen door, she heard voices near—Elsie's and Mrs. Hope's. They were in the dairy, where Mrs. Hope was superintending the packing up of a large quantity of butter, and Elspeth and a rosy-faced little maid-servant were actively engaged also.

As Agatha peeped in at the door, she saw Mrs. Hope standing with a book and pencil in her hand, a capacious white apron tied over her dress, and a plaid shawl fastened tightly round her neck. A large shady hat completed the costume.

“Good morning,” said Agatha, presently, “may I come in?”

“Good morning, my dear ; so you have been walking before breakfast, while we gave you the credit of being lazy?”

“Oh, I am only now going out. I have had my breakfast, and I thought I might explore a little. What beautiful butter! and how clean and sweet everything smells!”

Elsie raised herself from her occupation as Agatha spoke, and said scornfully—

“Ye were never in a dairy before, maybe. Ye thought it was a dark dismal hole. That lot makes twenty-six pounds, ma'am—have ye marked

it? Jeannie, lass, what do ye stand staring there for? As parlour breakfast is over at last, go and clear it away, or maybe the master will come in for his dinner and just find the coffee lees."

This was said in a tone of derision which Agatha understood, and finding she was not wanted, she pursued her way, and, however dull within, she was struck, as every one must be, from without, by the picturesque appearance of St. Mary's Farm.

The dwelling-house and the out-buildings formed three sides of what had been a quadrangle, and the part of the house which looked over the large square yard was evidently very old—so old that the uneven roof and the sunk gables, over which the ivy crept with strong embrace, looked as if, any night when a great gale swept over the valley, St. Mary's Farm might totter to its fall.

The narrow passage led to the more modern front of the house, with the two parlours, and bed-rooms above, one of which Agatha occupied. There was, as Mr. Bruce had said, no carriage-entrance to this side, and the long passage within had its parallel without in a narrow-flagged path, which led to a curious high gate, properly speaking, a wicket-gate, spanned by a

quaint stone arch, on which were cut in old characters some words in Latin.

Agatha noticed nothing of this now, however. She was eager to get beyond the limits of the farm-yard, and, letting a gate swing behind her, greatly to the alarm of a flock of geese, and a whole tribe of hens and chickens, she went swiftly through a narrow lane, with high hedges on either side, according to the unvariable custom of Devonshire lanes.

Presently there was a gate to her right, and standing there for a moment, Agatha saw a lovely valley stretched before her, St. Mary's Farm nestling at her feet, and beyond a succession of heathery undulations, the last rising higher and more abruptly than the others, and shutting out from the eye the villas of Havensmouth which clustered on the other side.

Turning away from the gate, Agatha again followed the lane, catching sight now and then of high sloping fields to her left, while before her rose another grassy hill, ending, as it seemed, abruptly, and looking as if it led no further.

"Where can the sea be?" she thought. "I hear it breaking on rocks somewhere, but I shall never find it out." At the bottom of the lane

there was a sudden dip at the foot of the grassy hill, up which a steep path wound, very much as the narrow way winds up Hill Difficulty, in the pictures with which we are familiar in "Pilgrim's Progress."

But Agatha climbed over a gate to her left, and began to follow a beaten track between the two grassy undulations. The air was fresh and soft, the autumn sun made the foliage of the maples, and a few other trees, all a-glow with the intensest orange and crimson, while the murmur of the waves was more distinctly heard.

Suddenly, as it seemed to Agatha, she came to the very edge of a steep, rocky cliff, down which some rugged steps led to the sea, lying beneath her at the distance of some hundred feet, and throwing up light feathery spray, as the waves dashed over the rough boulders of fantastic stones lying in the cove.

Agatha had never seen anything like this before, accustomed only to a watering-place which the Harrisons frequented, where vast plains of sand gave the impression of eternal sameness and monotony, the varied beauty of the Devonshire coast was indeed fresh and charming. The clear bright colour of the water

itself, the verdure which crept down the sides of the steep rocks, clothing them with graceful ivy, and plumes of hart's-tongue fern. The different hues of the rocks themselves, and the glimpse of distant coast, white and glistening in the morning sun, formed a picture which delighted Agatha's eye.

She began to think of her sketch-book, and the little case of colours which she had packed away in some remote corner of the big box, saying, as she did so, that it would be a long time before she drew them from their hiding-place; and she began, too, to be glad, and rejoice in the beauty within her reach, and to be nearer forgetting the imagined glories of snow-capped mountains and world-famed cathedrals, than she had been since the cold hand of disappointment had been laid upon her.

She skipped lightly down the rugged steps which led to the cove, and after winding in and out amongst the large boulders, climbed to the top of one, against which, on one side, the sea dashed, and sent up a fountain whose drops every now and then wetted her cheek. In a bend of the cove a boat was moored, and a stout fisher-boy was repairing one of the seats,

whistling an accompaniment to the sharp tap of his hammer.

After ten minutes had passed, Agatha heard a voice—a young, feeble voice—calling, just beneath the rock on which she was perched, “Johnnie, Johnnie, I am tired; I want to go home!” And bending forward, Agatha saw a little figure, which looked so like a great tuft of the brown sea-weed, that it was no wonder she had not discovered it before, seated in a sort of arm-chair, which was formed by a hollow place in the rock, and on which the sun shone full, and warm and bright.

“Johnnie, Johnnie!” was again repeated; and the boy at the boat threw down his hammer, and shouting, “All right, Jessie,” came striding over the rough beach to the child.

As he turned, he caught sight of Agatha, who was raised above the level of the shore some twenty feet. He stopped a moment, and looked inquiringly at her, and then raising his slouching fisherman’s hat, respectfully said, “Beg your pardon, miss, but the water comes right round that rock, and you’ll find it rather awkward getting down presently.”

As he spoke, Agatha rose, and the little brown heap lifted itself, and turned up a small,

pale face in the direction of her brother's eyes.

"Thank you," Agatha said, in reply; and looking behind her, she was surprised to see how much higher the water had risen during the ten minutes she had spent on the rock. But she got down as she had ascended, and, skipping over several deep pools which had been uncovered when she had first climbed to her seat, came to the foot of the steep path just as the boy did. He was carrying the child in his arms, her hands clasped round his neck, and her little white face resting against his shoulder.

"Is she ill?" Agatha inquired, as she followed the steady steps of the boy, who bore his burden as if it had been a feather's weight.

"She is lame, miss," was the reply, "and very weakly, too—aren't you, Jessie?"

"Yes," said Jessie, who was busily engaged in examining Agatha's face, as she lay with her head over her brother's shoulder. "Yes, if Johnnie didn't carry me about, I should never see the sea; and I weary to see it, when I sit at home and hear its voice. I am so fond of the sea."

"Do you live near here?" Agatha asked.

"In the cottage under St. Mary's Hill—that

steep one right before you when you come down the farm lane. Mother takes in washing, and I do odd jobs at the farm, when they want me; and when they don't, I try a little fishing; and when Jim is ashore we sometimes make a haul."

"Who is Jim?"

"My brother. He is boatswain aboard one of the steamers that ply between Havensmouth and Jersey; but sometimes he gets a turn ashore, and then he comes home. I should go to sea, too, in a brig bound for foreign countries, if it weren't for mother and Jess. But you see I can't leave them. I was just off, two years ago, when Mr. Bruce, at the farm, talked it out of me, or, I should say, showed me what a fine thing it was to cross one's own will for the sake of other folks."

They had reached the top of the steep path, now, and Johnnie placed Jessie on a bit of projecting rock, to rest his arms. Turning his face towards Agatha, she was struck with its fine, noble expression.

"It is my belief," Johnnie went on, "Mr. Bruce is as good, if not better, than all the parsons that ever lived. He has done for me, I know, what I'll say God bless him for to the end of life."

"And don't you ever wish to go to sea now?" Agatha asked, strangely interested in the boy's sudden confidence.

"Wish! Ah! I should say I did, sometimes. I love the sea, and so did my father before me; but knowing what I do, since Mr. Bruce taught me, what peace should I have going away from them that want me, and leaving my mother and Jess to scramble on, because I must have my own way? Now, Jess;" and taking the child up again, he fell behind Agatha, pausing to let her pass; and then they walked to the gate which Agatha had climbed, but which Johnnie lifted easily from the heavy iron latch.

On the opposite side of the lane, a fluttering of linen in the breeze, in a small enclosure, showed Agatha where Johnnie's cottage was. A thin, hard-worked looking woman was stretching up bare and sinewy arms to the linen poles.

As Johnnie bid Agatha a respectful "Good-morning," she heard a sharp voice say, "Oh, it's you, is it, at last? Never minding, not you, how I am a-slaving and a-working. You have never no peace unless you are at that nasty boat. I'll have it cut up for firing, I will. Giving the child her death of cold, too."

“All right, mother,” was the cheery answer; “I’ll just set Jess in her place, and give her her crutch, and then I’ll soon have that linen pinned up.”

Agatha was too far off to hear a distinct reply, but the tones of the voice were still sharp and scolding, and the cross words seemed to come thick and fast. At that moment a figure leaped over the gate, to her left, at some distance before her, and a Scotch sheep-dog followed with a bound. Turning to scent some real or supposed enemy in the hedge, Shag caught sight of Agatha. He gave a peculiar low, deep bark, half inquiring and half defiant. Mr. Bruce, who was striding quickly along the lane, looked back, and whistled to the dog. When he saw Agatha he retraced his steps to meet her, and asked her if she had had a pleasant walk. Then seeing her glance of distrust at Shag, he said, “You need not be afraid of Shag; he is far too discriminating to think you are an enemy.”

“It did not seem so just now,” said Agatha; “but I like dogs. I had two great friends at Shadrington—Bruno and Rough. Poor Rough! he and I shared the same fate; he was to be sent to the Parsonage, and I was to be sent here,

and neither of us consulted. Will Shag let me pat him?"

At a sign from his master, and "Shag, make friends," the expression of the dog's face seemed to alter.

Agatha stroked the rough head, and looked down into the soft brown eyes, and their friendship was sealed by "Good old Shag" from her, and the rubbing of his nose against her small, white hand, from him.

"I met such a nice boy on the beach," Agatha said.

"The beach! Have you been down to St. Mary's Cove already?"

"Yes, it is charming there; but about that handsome boy and his sick sister—you know them, don't you?"

"The boy, John Page, works on the farm sometimes; he is a fine fellow."

"So I thought; and what a horrid, scolding mother he has got. He told me he did not go to sea because it was his duty to stay and take care of her, and work for her. Really, it must be doubtful duty, I think, when all the reward he gets is a storm of words like that I heard just now. If I were Johnnie, I should take to the sea, I think, in my own defence."

“ And leave the little sick sister to get on as well as she could, and forget a commandment which is binding, whether mothers have sharp tongues or not?”

“ Well, it must be horridly disagreeable to live with Mrs. Page,” Agatha answered. “ It seems difficult to believe that boy can be her son; he looks quite above his class, and she is a cross-grained old washerwoman.”

“ Did you never hear of people whose bark was worse than their bite?” was the answer. “ A telling proverb, which a sage of Shag’s race must have had some means of communicating to ours. But, let me,” he continued, after a silence, “ show you the antiquities of St. Mary’s. What would you think this little upright building once was, reached by that long flight of rugged steps. Take care,” as Agatha sprang up them, “ they are very much worn. This was a chapel, in old times, in the perpendicular style ; and when St. Mary’s was inhabited by the lords of Dacre, an old Roman Catholic family, prayers were said here, day by day. Now the hens use it for a roosting-place. Look at the distinct remains of the Gothic windows, and those niches at the east end.”

“ St. Mary’s must have been a very different place then,” Agatha said.

“Yes, a great part of the quadrangle was then habitable, and is fallen into ruins, on the site of which barns and cowsheds are raised. The Pages’ cottage stands where tradition says there was once a religious house, which has given its name to the hill, the cove, and a large rocky mass, standing a little less than a mile out to sea, off the eastern point of the cove. But you cannot see St. Mary’s Island till you reach the top of the hill on either side.”

“How long have you lived here?” Agatha asked, abruptly.

“Ten years. My father rented the farm when he came to Havensmouth for my mother’s health, fifteen years ago. Our northern climate did not suit my mother, and she only came here to die. My sister, when she lost her husband, took up her abode with my father. He died nine years ago, and I came here, the year before from Oxford, as I believed, only to linger out a few months.”

“From Oxford!” Agatha said, with surprise; “what made you turn into a farmer?”

“Necessity. I broke down in health at Oxford—what with reading, and the hard push I had to make to meet my college expenses without burdening my father. I came to St. Mary’s

to find that out-of-door life in this soft air was to turn me not only, as you say, into a farmer, but into a strong man—thank God.”

They had left the old chapel now, and went together up the flag path to the gate at the side of the house. Mr. Bruce opened it, and closed it behind them.

“I found that old stone arch, or rather segment of an arch, with the motto on it, buried deep in some rubbish, amongst the outbuildings, and I had it put over this wicket-gate.”

Agatha looked up. “It is Latin ; I cannot read it. Tell me what it is.”

“They are good words,” he answered :—
‘ Dominus custodiat introitum tuum, et exitum tuum,’ ‘ The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in.’ ”

And Agatha remembered those words, and him who spoke them that day, in the years that were to come.

CHAPTER III.

SUNDAY AT ST. MARY'S.

"How poor are they that have not patience!
What wound did ever heal but by degrees?"

OTHELLO.

"MY dear," was Mrs. Hope's greeting, "what is to be done about your box? The omnibus has brought it, and the man charged a shilling, and by no possibility can it be got upstairs."

Poor Agatha, who had been forgetting the small rooms and dull passage, shut in by "narrowing nunnery walls," in the fresh sea breeze and the stories of the past, of which St. Mary's Farm seemed so full, was thus brought back to the prosaic present.

There stood the box, looking bigger than ever, by the kitchen door. There stood Elsie and old Philip, and the rosy-faced Jeanie, staring at the box and then at Agatha, with evident amazement.

"Roland," Mrs. Hope called, "what is to be done?"

Mr. Bruce, thus appealed to, came to the scene of discussion, for it could hardly be said to be action, and Shag pattered at his heels. He also gravely surveyed the intruder, walked round it, snuffed and snorted, and then, with stately nonchalance, walked away and lay down to await his master's decision.

Agatha's cheek, flushed with exercise, grew still more rosy, and she tried to look unconcerned.

"It really is enormous," Mrs. Hope said; "inconvenient in a large house, I should think. Could you not empty it downstairs, my dear, and I will help you to carry its contents to the press in your room?"

"I could do so," Agatha answered, "but everything I possess is in that box, and it is so well fitted up inside that I don't know where I should keep all my things without it, especially here. What shall I do?" she asked, turning to Mr. Bruce; "it is not really a larger box than most people have. Mrs. Harrison used it for travelling, and when we went to lodgings at Shinglesea, she always took it. She had a new one for her foreign tour, and then gave this to me, as I had only that small one of my own."

There was a twinkle of amusement in Mr.

Bruce's eye, which Agatha saw; and as he shrugged his shoulders, and said that it was evident in this case the mountain must go to Mahomet, Agatha caught the absurdity of the whole scene, and began to laugh. Elsie, who had hoped she was discomfited, and "put out," was not pleased, especially as the little ringing laugh was infectious. Jeanie giggled; and Philip uttered a low guttural sound, which he intended to express merriment, though it would have done as well for some very contrary emotion.

"And pray how long are we to stand idling here, ma'am?" Elsie asked; "the dinner spoiling, Philip hindered, and that bold lass taught to forget her manners before her betters. Be off this moment, Jeanie, to the scullery, and mind your own business. Those that are too big for small houses had just better stay where they are, seems to me;" and forthwith Elsie betook herself to the fire, and raked away at the lower bar, with a violence that showed the use of the poker was a welcome expression of her feelings.

"Now, Philip," said Mr. Bruce, "let us take the leather cover off first, it will lighten the weight if it will not lessen the size. My eye tells me that the box will go up the stairs, though I fear

there will be some scraping of the walls, which Elsie will disapprove."

"Take care, Roland, take care," Mrs. Hope interposed; "it is too much for you."

But the box was far less heavy than it looked, and though with not a hair's breadth to spare between it and the wall, Philip, who had first taken off his heavy, muddy boots, was soon backing up the narrow stairs, his master bearing the weight at the other end.

"They may get it up the stairs, but they will never turn the corner to the chamber door," muttered Elsie.

"Oh yes, they will," said Agatha, in a triumphant voice, from the foot of the staircase, where she had watched the ascent; "they have done it already." And then, waiting for the return of Mr. Bruce and Philip, Agatha offered her thanks, and in such a pretty, simple way, that old Philip was half won over from Elspeth's side. But Mrs. Hope was, on the contrary, more inclined to take up Elsie's view of Agatha. She did not understand her giving Roland so much trouble, and scraping the stone-coloured paper from the walls, without a word of apology. Fainting in the arm-chair on her first arrival was easily forgiven, for she could not help that; but coming

down to breakfast two hours after the right time, and laughing at the disturbance which that "Noah's Ark"—unsuitable for any girl of her age—occasioned in the little household, was quite a different matter. Was the size of the box a sort of indication of the real state of the case, and would it prove that Agatha was not made to fit in with them? These fears had rather increased by the evening, when Agatha dressed for tea in a pink muslin, and tied a bit of ribbon of the same colour in her hair. The dress was of the very simplest kind, and the muslin had once been Mrs. Harrison's, and had been amongst the many "converted garments" which, in clearing out her wardrobe for a residence abroad, Mrs. Harrison had been rather puzzled what to do with, and which she had given to Agatha as a sort of set-off to her conscience for the hasty manner in which she had dismissed her from Shadrington. Simple as the dress was, it contrasted with Mrs. Hope's well-worn dark silk, which had been put on for the early dinner, and served for afternoon and evening costume in one.

But plain and unpretending as was Mrs. Hope's dress, no one for a moment could have doubted that she was a gentlewoman. She was tall, and, perhaps, a little angular in figure, but

her head was well set on her shoulders, and her glossy hair smoothly braided back, under a matronly cap. Her forehead was wide and smooth, and her eyebrows strongly marked. But in spite of high cheek-bones and a wide mouth—true Scotch characteristics—Mrs. Hope was a handsome woman, scarcely past her prime.

Mr. Bruce was sufficiently like his sister to indicate the relationship between them, though his features were of a more delicate and refined type, and his grey eyes, set deeply under the level brows, and shaded by dark lashes, could be very winning in their expression, and could tell of almost womanly softness and gentleness. His mouth was firmly knit, and was severe when in repose, but when it relaxed into a smile, it conveyed the impression of a real, genuine kindness which forced or even habitual smiles of courtesy or custom never give. His build was slight, though his height was over six feet, and in this, and the transparency of the complexion, might be traced the inherited delicacy from his mother, of which he had spoken to Agatha. His hair was soft and fine, and had receded a little from the temples and forehead, and made him look older than he really was. At times, too,

there was a look in his face of a man over whom a wave of disappointment had rolled—of a man who was not reaching forward to much earthly happiness, but who had learned the great lesson for faithful and true hearts, that life is a battle-field, where the soldier may never lay down his armour, but rather gird it about him more closely, day by day, as time goes on.

The evening passed slowly to Agatha. Mr. Bruce disappeared for an hour, after tea, to his study upstairs, a small room over the entrance door, where he kept all his business papers; those on the table in the recess in the sitting-room were for his recreation. Mrs. Hope worked diligently at her needle, and said very little; she was not a woman of much conversation, and talked to few people but her brother Roland. Agatha made a few attempts to break the silence, and at last gave up the mere pretence of work which a little bit of embroidery afforded, and let her hands fall idly in her lap. To busy, active Mrs. Hope, this little pink-robed figure, seated on a carpet-covered footstool instead of a chair, was an annoyance. As if by contrast, she sat more erect than usual, and her needle flew over the seams more swiftly, rivalling the rapidity of a Grover and Baker's or Wheeler and Wilson's machine.

Suddenly Agatha spoke—"Mrs. Hope, you remember my mother ; am I like her ?"

"Not at all, my dear ; I should think you resemble your father's family."

"Would you tell me what she was like ? I remember my father, but when I think of my mother, I confuse her with others ; I was carried in to see her when she was ill, and I can recall how she looked then—her eyes very large and bright, and she said my name in a whisper—but as she was when she walked about Wastemere Parsonage, I don't remember a bit."

"Your mother, Agatha, was very tall and thin in figure, and had fair hair and blue eyes. We were a great deal together for two years of my life at school. She was my senior by a few years, but we were great friends. She was very bright, and active, and industrious, quick in everything she did. She was rather romantic, and her marriage was not a wise one ; your father was always delicate, and they had so very little to live upon. Then they had a great deal of sickness and many little children, who died when babies. Your poor mother was worn out, and when a slight fever attacked her she sank under it. I was in India when she died, and had only just come home when you lost your father. I heard a relative of his had given you a home, and I wrote once or twice

to Mrs. Harrison to inquire for you, but she never answered my last letter. That was ten years ago."

"Yes, I was only eight—not eight years old when I went to Shadrington. Is that all you know, all you can tell me of my mother?" she asked, unsatisfied.

"Yes, I think so," Mrs. Hope replied; "I have somewhere a daguerreotype likeness of your mother, taken when we were at school. Some day I will show it to you."

"Oh, thank you. I have a little miniature on ivory, a profile, but I never can realize my mother when I look at it."

"Those miniatures were always so flattered," Mrs. Hope said.

"I never knew you were in India," Agatha continued, after a pause; "was—was Mr. Hope a soldier?"

"He was a missionary," Mrs. Hope answered, shortly, "sent by the Scotch Church Mission to work in his Master's vineyard, and in the burden and heat of the day he died."

"How dreadful," Agatha said; "and you had to come home alone—how could you bear it?"

"My dear, I trust I bore it by casting my care on One who was able and willing to help me."

And Agatha had time for no more questioning

then, for Mr. Bruce came in, lighted a candle at his table, took out his books and papers, and prepared to write.

“Roland, I hope Elsie had kept up the fire in your study to-night.”

“Oh, yes, thank you; but I really scarcely needed it.”

Mrs. Hope wondered if Agatha would still sit on that low stool; it fidgeted her in some unexplained way, and at last she said, “Agatha, do you prefer that seat to a chair?”

“Yes, thank you, I like it very much,” and seeing Mr. Bruce settling to his writing, Agatha said, “Have you a book there I may read?”

“Any that you like, or any on those shelves. I am afraid we have very few story books, but there is some variety, nevertheless. Poetry—history—travels! Here is a cheap edition of ‘Evangeline’; I bought it at the station when I was waiting for the train last night. Will you have that? unless you know it by heart already.”

“That will do nicely, thank you,” she said; so the rest of the evening passed. Then came supper, and then prayers, and for the first time in her life, unless in childish days, at her father’s knee, Agatha was arrested by the beauty and simplicity of a Bible narrative.

Long afterwards she remembered how the earnest well-modulated voice read the parable of the foolish virgins, and going on through the whole of that chapter, gave the last few verses with a solemn emphasis which was remarkable. Very often must Agatha have heard that chapter read in church by Mr. Willmott—often, perhaps, had it come in due course on Sunday evenings in the school-room at Shadrington—she must have read the words herself; but now that unexplained, but unfailing influence, exercised by those who are faithful and true of heart; who feel, to their soul's depth, the truth and beauties of what they read, was upon Agatha. She listened as she had never listened to God's Word before. That picture drawn by the King Himself would be a great reality one day. Those words would fall from his lips, she must hear them—which would be addressed to her—*Depart*, or *Come*? A prayer, according to the custom of the Presbyterian Church, from no book, followed from Mrs. Hope, to which old Elspeth's voice uttered a prompt amen, and then the family separated for the night.

The two next mornings were as fine as the first, and on the third, Agatha was again starting for a walk, when Mrs. Hope called her. "The letters have just come, Agatha; here are two for you."

“Two for me!” Agatha exclaimed, and the brightest colour came to her cheek, as she recognized the writing on the envelope of one. Agatha had again been late for breakfast, or, rather, had failed every morning to present herself at prayers; and Mrs. Hope was not in consequence disposed to retract yesterday’s opinion. As Agatha was hurrying away with her treasures, she called to her, “Do you not think it a good plan, my dear, to settle down to reading or working for an hour or two every morning. I am always occupied early in the day, but on Saturday afternoon I go into Havensmouth for shopping. I start about two o’clock; I thought, if you liked, you might go with me, and stay at home this morning.”

“I have got my sketch-book,” was Agatha’s reply; “I was going down to the cove to find something to draw. Must I stay at home?”

The *must* was strongly emphasized, and Mrs. Hope only replied, “Oh, if you have any occupation, it is different; I think young people——”

But Agatha did not wait for the end of the sentence, and acting on this tacit consent to her absence, she ran through the gate and down the lane again with marvellous speed. “I will go to the top of St. Mary’s Hill this morning for a

change," she thought, "and read my letters there. I will open Beatrice's now, and keep the other."

Beatrice's letter was very badly written, and very untidy. Great sprawling childish characters wandered in an eccentric fashion up and down two sheets of paper. But Agatha cared more for those blotted lines than she could have believed possible a month before. Real genuine affection peeped out from the ill-shaped letters, and there were pathetic appeals to Agatha to sympathize in the inconvenience she and Vic suffered already in losing her. "Papa had been dreadfully glum the last two days," was the concluding information, "and mamma horribly particular and cross. Eustace had come home the very evening Agatha had left Shadrington by the last train, which did not stop at Layton, so he had taken a fly from Northborough, and did not get home till every one was in bed. And now this morning mamma and Eustace have had a quarrel, I think. Eustace was angry about something or other. Beatrice knew that by the way he pulled his moustache, but Beatrice did not know what had put him out." It appeared from a postscript inserted on a separate slip of paper, that Victoria had found out what "enraged Eustace." He

was indignant that you had been sent off to those farm people at Havensmouth, and said it was a shame. I heard him tell mamma so, and that he had met you at one of the stations by accident; he said he could only go as far as Paris with us; he must study this winter. Won't that be horrid for us? Never mind, Aggy, we'll get you back some day, so says your loving Vic.

N.B.—“I went up into the plantations this morning with Bruno, and somehow my brand new hat, with the white eider wing fell into that ditch, by Harper's cottage. Didn't I catch it! Mind you write to us, and tell us all about everything.”

“Poor old Vic!” was Agatha's amused exclamation aloud. “How strange it is, she and I, and Bee have lived together ten years, and never found out till we were separated that we cared for one another; but I suppose it is the way of the world.” And now, holding the other letter close, Agatha began the ascent of St. Mary's Hill. It was much steeper and more difficult than she had fancied to get to the top; but at last, panting and breathless, she threw herself down on the turf, and looked over one of the finest scenes in England. The extreme horn

of the bay to the right ended in an abrupt headland ; but from Agatha's high position she could see the line of open sea beyond it. All the countless curves and indentations of the coast were laid before her, and where the sea ran up to Havensmouth, the white villas smiled upon the hills which encircled the bay, and dotted the high ground behind Agatha, showing how near, though to all seeming so far, St. Mary's Farm was to the gay and much frequented watering-place. Far away, beyond hills and fields, rose the noble outline of the Dartmoor range, and coming round to the left again, the eye followed the line of railway as it wound by a number of lesser watering-places, and then the panorama was completed by lofty chalk cliffs, and in very dim outline Portland Island. All this Agatha gazed at with the enthusiasm of a real lover of the beautiful in nature ; and the extreme clearness of the atmosphere, the deep blue of the sky and sea, and the fresh breeze, made her young heart beat with that joy of living, which is known only in the spring of life.

Immediately below her, at the distance of three hundred feet, was St. Mary's Island, its jagged outline standing out against the water and its slope covered with short grass, now

an emerald green in the sunshine. Opening her letter at length, with the sort of self-imposed restraint with which a child will keep the largest parcel amongst a pile of birthday presents to the last, or take every strawberry but the finest from his plate, leaving the *bonne bouche* for the final treat, Agatha read the clear, though somewhat small handwriting of Eustace Harrison. She could scarcely have explained even to herself what she expected, but the letter was read and re-read, and when she looked at the blue sea again, something of a shadow had fallen over it, or over her.

The letter began by referring to a small manuscript book of Agatha's which Eustace had taken away when he left Shadrington, and which he said he would return when he could look for it in his chambers. He had hoped there would have been no necessity for sending it back, but that Agatha would have reclaimed it during their winter abroad. He was sorry that he was not to have the pleasure of sketching with her at Lausanne or Bellaggio, but his plans had also somewhat altered. It was possible that he should only go as far as Paris with the rest of the party, and he intended to be industrious, and work at the Temple.

He began to think the Woolsack would be a more comfortable and profitable seat than Shadrington, and he hoped, if that desirable end was ever attained, he should receive Agatha's congratulations. A few words more in the same strain, and then the letter ended.

It was put into the pocket of Agatha's little sketch-book, and then, with sudden impulse, she withdrew it from its hiding-place, and tearing it into tiny fragments, watched them fluttering away in the wind with an expression of satisfaction. She was soon running down St. Mary's Hill with a light agile step, never stopping till she had reached the gate leading to Johnnie Page's cottage. Here she paused a moment, and hearing the faint sound of a child crying, went down the path to the door of the house. It was open, and by it sat poor little Jessie.

"What is the matter?" she asked; "where is your mother?"

"Oh! I am so tired; I have been alone such a long time. Mother is gone with a load of linen on the truck, and Johnnie is at work at the farm to-day, and I can't move till they come back."

"Let me move you," said Agatha, gently;

"it is very unkind of them to leave you alone so long."

"No, it isn't; they can't help it," said the child; "I am in one of my wicked grumbling fits to-day, that is how it is. Mother has got to work, and so has Johnnie, and I have only got to be patient," said Jessie, wiping her eyes with her little brown pinafore. "If you could just move me, miss, into the arm-chair, that will do. I ain't heavy," she continued, with a curious wistful expression in her large blue eyes.

Agatha put her arms round the child, and was surprised to find how light she was; she propped her up in the chair with two cushions in gay print cases, and asked, "Is that more comfortable?"

Jessie nodded.

"Where do you live, miss?" she asked; "or are you only a visitor for the winter?"

"I am come to live at the farm, St. Mary's Farm," Agatha answered.

"At the farm," and Jessie's face brightened; "what, with Mrs. Hope and Mr. Bruce? Oh, you will be happy then! Mr. Bruce taught me all I know, and Johnnie too. The very sight of him sends away my pain sometimes. When we first came to live here, I did nothing but fret and whine all day, and wore out Johnnie and mother;

and then Johnnie was wild to go to sea, and we were so miserable, and then Mr. Bruce took notice of us, and showed me that it was God's will I should suffer and be a cripple, and showed Johnnie what he ought to do, and how kind words take away the sting from angry ones ; and, oh, a great deal which you, miss, know better than I do, I dare say ; and how Jesus suffered for us, and if we love Him everything is different."

Agatha was silent. She felt she knew a great deal less than poor little Jessie.

"How old are you?" she asked.

"Going in twelve, miss."

"Twelve!" echoed Agatha, for the small shrunk figure was like that of a child of six.

"Yes, I never grow, you know ; and as I am so lame, I think I am glad I am small, for you see Johnnie could not carry me so well if I was big."

The wheels of a hand-truck were now heard approaching, and Agatha saw that Jessie's little face betrayed uneasiness. In truth, she was always doubtful what mood Mrs. Page might be in, and Jessie knew her mother would not be pleased that a stranger should have moved her from the chair, where she had been left so long.

It proved so, for Mrs. Page, having scolded the girl well who had helped her to take home the linen, came into the house, and glancing at Agatha, scolded Jessie for troubling a lady to wait on her, for Mrs. Page knew that the child could not move without assistance.

"Your servant, miss," she said, turning to Agatha. "If you are belonging to any gentry come for the winter, will you please to mention me as laundress? I am sorry this poor crippled child of mine should have troubled you with her whimsies. Perhaps you are the new family come to Monta Rosa, close by St. Mary's Church, if so, I shall be proud to wait on you."

"Oh, no," said Agatha, "I am living near you, at the farm."

"Indeed, miss!" and Mrs. Page's manner changed. "You'll be come amongst mighty good folks there then, and you'll get your turn of being preached to. Keeping your church once a week, and living respectable and honest, and doing your duty in that state of life where God has put you, ain't enough there. It all goes for nothing, it does, never mind how hard-working and poor a widow woman may be!"

Agatha was moving towards the door while

this speech was delivered. She was anxious to cut it short.

"Good-bye, Jessie," she said; "I will come and see you again soon, shall I?"

"Oh, please do," the child said, earnestly; and then bidding Mrs. Page a good morning, which had so much dignity in it that it made the woman silent for the moment, she left the cottage.

"What a dreadful woman!" she thought. "How I pity the children;" and then she began to meditate on what little Jessie had said, "If we love Him, everything is different." And it was strange to Agatha to hear Mr. Bruce spoken of as the one who had taught this lame child to suffer patiently, and her brother to be forbearing, and to give up his own will for the sake of others. Clergymen and middle-aged women she knew, like Miss Willmott and her brother, at Shadrington, went about amongst the poor, and read to them when they were ill; but that a man should do this sort of thing—a man like Mr. Bruce—seemed to her incomprehensible. If Agatha had heard that Mrs. Hope had taught Jessie Page to be gentle and patient under suffering, she would not have been at all surprised. Mrs. Hope answered to her ideal of a

very good person, who was religious herself, and wished other people to be so too ; but that Mr. Bruce, with all his active work, and literary tastes, which the blue-lined paper on the small table and the books on the shelf betrayed, should care about a boy and girl in a cottage, care for their souls as well as their bodies, she did not understand ; it was altogether a mystery.

The afternoon Agatha spent in Havensmouth was amusing, and made a pleasant variety in her daily life.

Mrs. Hope had a great deal of shopping to do, and she was, like most of her nation, very particular to give the just, and only the just, price for anything she bought. The relative prices and merits of brown linseys at one of the principal shops in Havensmouth lasted so long, that Agatha left the counter, and went to the door to watch the throng of people passing to and fro on the Strand, which is the name given to the line of shops having the harbour before them, and the high ground shutting in the town from the north and east behind them. Here carriages roll up and down ; here invalids, who need amusement, drive in low pony-chairs, or walk with slow step, with respirators over

their mouths, and sticks or umbrellas in their hands. Here gay young girls flutter and disport themselves, and idle men, who have nothing to do but to talk and gossip, congregate. Now and then a party on horseback rode past, and it seemed to Agatha that every one wore smiles and looked happy, and she could not help contrasting her own loneliness and exile from the young and gay, with the charmed circle in which everyone else seemed to move.

At last Mrs. Hope's business was finished, and joining Agatha, she said—

“This is my last commission. Perhaps you will like to walk round the other side of the Strand up to the Beacon. We shall have time, I think.”

“Yes,” Agatha said; “I should like to look in at that large shop, where there are so many pictures and photographs, very much. What a gay, lively place Havensmouth is! so different to St. Mary's Farm.”

“Yes, the season is now beginning, and the invalids are flocking in. Our church was very full last Sunday.”

“St. Mary's Church, do you mean?”

“My dear, I don't go to St. Mary's. I am thankful to say I am a member of the Scotch

Church, and Mr. MacPherson is our minister. There is so large a colony of Scotch here every winter that we have a handsome building for our church, and Mr. MacPherson has had a manse built for him. We shall pass the church presently, on our right hand."

"Do you know many people here?" Agatha asked, for in the gay and fashionable crowd she noticed that Mrs. Hope had made only one bow of recognition.

"No," Mrs. Hope answered. "I have a few friends, quiet people, like myself, mostly those with whom I have a link in the past—people of my own country, who are brought here for health; but Havensmouth is a place where one may live as isolated a life as one pleases; besides, you know, grand folks are not likely to be seeking out people at St. Mary's Farm for their friends."

"You are as well born, or better born, than most of the people here, I dare say," said Agatha.

"Of course we are." Mrs. Hope never spoke in the singular number. "Of course we are. But that does not signify. And I am sure we don't want society. Roland is so occupied with his farm business, and his reading and writing."

"What does Mr. Bruce write?" Agatha asked.

"He contributes papers on agriculture to magazines, and other articles too; and he has translated some German poetry very well; not that I care for or understand poetry, but I admire his essays—so practical and clear. Roland is a person of very superior talents," Mrs. Hope continued, and Agatha discovered then that on this subject Mrs. Hope could be eloquent.

As they walked home together in the deepening twilight, a sort of epitome of the brother's life was set before her by the sister—the sister who felt for him a half maternal and wholly admiring love.

"The time when Roland broke down at Oxford was the dark day of his life. I don't know that I ought to say so either, for it turned him from the love of the world to the love of God. His boyish heart was set upon attaining distinction, and he missed it, he says, by striving too hard after it. Then his boyish love was fixed upon a woman, who said she loved him. And when he came here, as we all thought to die, she made him her curtsy, and married some one else before three months were over. The person she married is a relation of ours—Nigel Bruce, who has a

pretty little estate just over the border, to which Roland is the heir." And then, with minute detail, Mrs. Hope traced out the family tree, and it appeared, that Nigel Bruce and Roland's father were first cousins, Nigel being the only son of the elder brother; that he had only three daughters by his marriage with Miss Houghton; and thus her brother, Roland Bruce, at this moment, might be considered, indeed was, the heir of Glenbarrow, though scarcely ten years younger than Nigel, "who yet may have a son," Mrs. Hope said. "I don't believe, however, that thoughts of inheriting Glenbarrow ever cross Roland's mind; and when I think of it, as I do sometimes, I always feel how uncertain it is whether he could bear the keen air of the dear old north country, for his chest is undoubtedly delicate, and this mild climate has, with God's blessing, saved his life. Roland's talents and acquirements may seem to some to be wasted where he is, but I do not allow myself to think so. He is doing his Master's work in a quiet, unobtrusive way; and if ever I catch myself desiring greater things for him, I seem to hear a voice saying, 'Desire them not!' Nigel Bruce and his wife were here five years

ago. Mrs. Bruce thought herself delicate, and that was the excuse she made for wintering here. When I saw Roland by his cousin's side, I did feel proud and satisfied. The man of the world, with his smooth-tongued but false-hearted wife, looked worn, and jaded, and weary; while the man who had taken up the service of God was bright, and cheerful, and glad."

"Did Mr. Bruce," Agatha asked—"I mean, how did he meet the lady who had behaved so ill to him?"

"As a Christian should, my dear," was the reply. And then, having exhausted her favourite topic, the only one on which Mrs. Hope was ever eloquent, she relapsed into silence, walking on by her young cousin's side with firm, decided step, and going over in her mind all the purchases she had made; settling herself to the belief that the linsey at two and ninepence a yard was really as good as the one at three shillings, though the colour was not the new brown which the shopman had assured her was so fashionable this season.

As the weeks went on, Agatha found herself looking forward to that afternoon in Havensmouth as her weekly treat. She began to know

the faces of the passers-by on the Strand, and to watch with interest girls with delicate fathers and brothers, and anxious-looking mothers with some frail, invalid daughter propped up in a carriage, or drawn slowly along in a chair.

Most of the Saturdays were bright, the Sundays were dull. Mr. Bruce and his sister separated on these days. His mother had been Episcopalian, and from choice and conviction he always attended the English church. Agatha, thought it was expected of her to go with Mrs. Hope, and church was to her but a Sunday form that had to be gone through; and when old Mr. Willmott was reading the prayers, and preached for ten or fifteen minutes afterwards, her thoughts were mostly wandering off in dreams and undefined longings for future happiness, which should have had no indulged place in God's holy temple. So, when Mrs. Hope asked her to be ready by ten o'clock the first Sunday morning, she went to put on her pretty black bonnet with its crimson rose, and set off, quite satisfied that a Scotch church was as good as an English one. But the length of Mr. MacPherson's extempore prayers and sermon, the equally long hymns and psalms which were sung, became, after the first two or three times, a weariness

greater than she knew how to endure. Then the earnest devotion of Mrs. Hope by her side, the gravity and unanimity of the whole large congregation, made Agatha only feel the more restless.

The fourth Sunday was drizzling wet, and Agatha had a cold, and was to be left at home to her unspeakable relief.

"If it is very wet, I shall not come home to dinner," Mrs. Hope said. "Mrs. MacPherson is always so kind as to ask me into the Manse on wet Sundays. She does not forget good Scotch customs. It's a pity you have a cold, for I should have liked you to see the MacPhersons; and the conversation at the Manse on the Sabbath-day is just what it ought to be. I will leave you some books, my dear, and I hope you will spend the day profitably. Roland will come in to dinner at one o'clock, but he has a class of boys for instruction every Sunday afternoon in the laundry; Elsie will walk into Havensmouth for afternoon service, and I shall return with her, unless it is very wet, and then I shall have a chair to the top of the lane. Good-bye." And buttoning herself up in her waterproof cloak, Mrs. Hope departed.

Agatha settled herself in Mr. Bruce's chair,

and, stirring the fire, determined to make herself comfortable; but the morning was long and dull; there was nothing to be seen from the windows but that square of grass and the battlemented wall, with its pendant ivy, every leaf of which was dropping with moisture. The stillness of everything around was oppressive, and as occasionally old Elspeth broke out into a verse of Scotch Psalmody in the kitchen, Agatha hailed the sound as a relief. Then she tried to read one of the books Mrs. Hope had left, but they were all to her mind hopelessly dull. At last she resorted to letters she had received from Beatrice and Victoria Harrison, written from Paris; but their scrambling, disjointed account of all they had seen and heard there did not raise her spirits. Why was she not with them, instead of being shut up in a house like St. Mary's Farm, and thus shut out from all the rest of the world.

At last, heavy with her cold, she took a little nap, and started up as Elsie entered the room to lay the cloth for dinner, and Mr. Bruce came in almost at the same time. Agatha's flushed, hot cheeks and half-bewildered air puzzled him.

"I am afraid your cold is worse," he said.

"No," Agatha replied, with a yawn, "only

I have been fast asleep. I did not know what else to do. Isn't it a horrid day?"

"It does not actually rain," he said, looking down at her with a sort of pitying expression; but he said no more.

CHAPTER IV.

WORK AND INFLUENCE.

"It is clear, from history and every day observation, that what is really wanted to touch the hearts of the multitude is the living spectacle of a warm and genuine piety. *One* such character has before now bent the hearts of even greater numbers than are congregated in our large towns, and this influence either creates its own machinery or dispenses with it."

"The Times," October, 1866.

JUST in the same listless attitude Mr. Bruce found Agatha, when he came into the sitting-room in the afternoon; but as the firelight gleamed upon her face, he could see there were tears upon the long dark lashes, which rested on the hot cheeks.

"Have you had another Sunday dream?" Mr. Bruce asked.

"I have been to sleep again," she replied. "What else was there to do? If I stay here, may I go to St. Mary's Church instead of the Scotch one? I thought last Sunday that the

sermon would never end, and they don't preach such long ones at other churches—do they?"

"Perhaps not," was the answer; "but most decidedly you may go to St. Mary's if you prefer it."

"Yes; and if I stay here," Agatha went on; "but I have been thinking I had better go somewhere as a governess. I really feel I want to do something, and perhaps I am an incumbrance here. I was sent here, you know, against Mrs. Hope's wish."

"And against your own will!" he interposed.

"Yes, against my own will," she truthfully repeated. "But I must tell you, I want something more stirring and full of variety than life can be here. You are very kind to me, but you see I have nothing to do. I have not even clothes to make, as Mrs. Harrison fitted me out with her cast-off things before I left her. Then I sit and read, and Mrs. Hope does not quite like it, I think; and I have not spirit to finish the only sketch I have made. Somehow, the very sight of my colours and brushes reminds me of all I hoped to see and to do this winter, and of my disappointment; for it was a great disappointment—you can't think how great. After the dull routine of school-room life at Shadrington,

it was so charming, so very nice, to look forward to travelling and constant change, and to seeing all the places and things I had read about. But it is no use going over that. Could you get an advertisement put into the newspapers for me? I have plenty of pocket-money to pay for it. I know it costs something. Will you please help me?"

"I will gladly help you, if you seriously wish it. But have you counted the cost of what being a governess implies, as well as the cost of the advertisement?"

"Oh, of course. I know the children will be troublesome and naughty, and that I shall be snubbed and petted by turns. I know what Miss Francis had to bear at Shadrington, but I don't think I should mind it. I should like to go to London, or near London; I must say that in my advertisement. I really have had a good education, and could teach better than some people, I think."

"I don't doubt it," was the quick reply; "but I think you had better take time to consider before you choose your own way so determinedly. Also, I think Mr. Harrison should be consulted."

"Oh! Uncle Robert is very kind, he would

be sure to tell me to please myself; besides, I cannot consult him—he told me if I were not happy here I was to let him know, and he would come to take me back. And then, if I told him I wanted to be a governess, he would directly think I am miserable here, which would not be true. I love the rocks, and the sea, and the quaint old farm, with all the stories it suggests of the past, but, indeed, indeed, I am restless, and I feel as if I wanted to be of use—to do something. I scarcely know what it is I want—I could not tell you.”

“Perhaps I could tell you,” Mr. Bruce said. “You want to find your rest.”

“I want to find work and activity,” she said, quickly.

“Yes, I know that, but you want to look up to One you trust, and reverence, and love, and say, ‘Show me thy work.’ If you took service under that Master, you would find rest and peace in Him, and in the work He gave you to do.”

“Oh, I see what you mean,” said Agatha; “but, even if I felt all that religious people do, look how far removed I am from any chance of being busy and useful. All the girls in stories which I have read who are held up as models,

were in large families, or placed in a large circle of acquaintances and friends—Ethel, in ‘The Daisy Chain,’ and ‘all the girls in those tales, you know.”

“No, I don’t know, for I never read them; but this I do know, that where God places us is our right place; that if we seek to find out His will concerning us, we shall find it; that if we acknowledge Him, that promise over the gateway you asked me to translate the first day you were here, is ours: ‘The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in.’”

“I dare say it is true,” she said, in a hopeless tone, “only I don’t think you understand what I mean.”

“I understand what disappointment means,” he said. “When I first came to live at St. Mary’s Farm I felt the restlessness you describe; but God showed me His work, and what He appointed for me was far better than what I had appointed for myself.”

“Yes, but then you have work, and I have not,” she persisted. “You are busy about the farm, or writing and reading—writing what is printed, Mrs. Hope says. I wish you would let me read some of your essays on cows, and feeding sheep, and draining land.”

“You would find them very dry and dull; I versified a little German poem the other day, which is more to your taste, I should think. I will let you have the book, to read it; but that is written, not printed.”

“Thank you! and will you look at the advertisement I have written, and tell me if it will do?”

“To-morrow, not now; and, till the advertisement is answered to your satisfaction, and you are setting the big box in order for a move, shall I find you some work?”

“If you can.”

“Well, that little lame girl, Jessie, has no one to teach her regularly, suppose you help her to learn some woman’s handicraft. Then there is an old man in the cottage at the top of St. Mary’s Lane, he likes nothing better than to be read and talked to: There is some out-of-door work for you, and don’t let your brushes lie idle. You have a talent for drawing, and it is your business, your work, if you like, to cultivate it. So with reading, take a good tough book in hand, and master it; and, as to the rest, I think Gracie and I have forgotten what humdrum old people we must seem to you. I will ask Miss Bromfield to call on you, she is bright and fresh, and

traditional young ladies are always ready to establish a friendship, I believe."

"I am not a traditional young lady, then—I could not take to any one who was asked to call upon me. If Miss Bromfield had wished to know me, she might have called before. Is she the daughter of the clergyman who came to see Mrs. Hope the other afternoon?"

"Yes; and probably Mr. Bromfield had no idea of your presence here till then. And now," he said, as the rattle of the tea-cups was heard, and Jeanie entered with the tray—"and now, if I have seemed to preach to you, and assume too much that I know better than you do, you must forgive me. Fourteen years make a long gap in age, and, as you asked my advice about the governess plan, you in some measure brought it on yourself."

"Yes, but I don't want to be treated like a child;" and she looked up at the face which looked down on her, as Mr. Bruce stood by the chimney-piece, leaning one arm on it, while, with the other, he played with Shag's long hair. "But I believe you really mean what you say, and that you feel all that about—about good things. I wish I felt as you do. I wish," her voice faltered, and she broke off with what was

nearly a sob;—then, making a great effort, she added, “You may know what disappointment is, but you cannot know what it is to be desolate and friendless, as I do.”

“Not desolate or friendless any more, if you will turn to Him who is so ready to receive you. And I think,” he continued, “you may count upon two friends in this house who will be sorry if you speak of being a burden to them, or of anxiety to leave them;” and, almost involuntarily, he raised his hand, and laid it gently on her head, saying, “God bless you, and show you His work.”

She looked up at him in a simple, child-like way, and said, “Thank you.” An instinctive feeling of trust in the sincerity and reality of him who had spoken so plainly to her, came over Agatha. Such words had never been addressed to her before, and the thought would come, he ought to be a clergyman, I did not know any people but clergymen were so good, or could talk in that way. And it was not often that Mr. Bruce did *talk*; it ~~was~~ a long time before Agatha heard any such words from him again. His work was hidden, a noiseless, unseen influence, which the busy, well-meaning workers of the day could not understand. Mr. Bromfield

was sometimes puzzled, and would say to him he thought it was a pity he did not come more prominently forward in Havensmouth, and take his right place in society. A quiet smile would be the reply, with the assurance that he thought he had taken his right place, and so the subject would drop.

Mr. Bromfield had the care of that part of Havensmouth which lay nearest to St. Mary's Farm. The modern church stood at the head of the long winding lane which led only to the farm and the few cottages adjoining, and which was little frequented; but, once emerging from between the high hedges on either side, with their fence of maple and alder, and their tapestry of ferns and mosses, the church of St. Mary's came in sight, and, clustering about it on all sides, were villas of every shape and size, with every conceivable name painted on the white gates, which opened on gravel drives thickly planted with arbutus and laurel.

In one of these, Linden Villa, Mr. Bromfield lived—it stood with half a dozen others of precisely similar proportion, on the brow of the hill overlooking St. Mary's Farm, and had its own garden, conservatory, and terrace walk, its small lawn, and even its strip of kitchen-garden, sunk beneath

the upper part, after the fashion of hanging gardens on the slope of hills all over the world.

At the gate of Linden Villa Mr. Bruce was standing one morning with Mr. Bromfield, two or three days after the conversation with Agatha by the firelight on that wet Sunday afternoon. "I have to thank you very much," Mr. Bromfield was saying, "for your care of the Browns and Netherways, and," referring to a little book in his hand, "of those incorrigible Smiths. But I think what you have done with the boys, on Sunday afternoon is wonderful. Page works for you, I believe?"

"Occasionally; but he has plenty to do at home, poor fellow."

"Ah, with that lame child and the scolding mother. Really, Mr. Bruce, you are almost a curate to me. I always regret you are not in Holy orders."

Something like a shadow passed over Mr. Bruce's face as he replied, "It is very good of you to say so, but that point seemed so decidedly settled for me some years ago, and at the time there could be no question as to my duty. Moreover, my health was then not what it is now."

"Ah, ah! but Havensmouth has made a strong man of you; it is a wonderful climate—really won-

derful. I think my poor wife's life is prolonged by it. Well, Margie," he said, addressing a girl of two or three and twenty, who now came down the drive, "are you ready?"

"Yes, papa," and then she shook hands with Mr. Bruce, saying, "and it is half-past eleven; we shall be late."

"I am going to take her to a ladies' committee meeting in Havensmouth, about the Industrial Society. Come, then, Margie, we must bid Mr. Bruce good morning."

"I have a request to make of Miss Bromfield," Mr. Bruce said. "A young cousin of my sister's is staying with us now, and will probably remain at St. Mary's Farm through the winter. Will Miss Bromfield come and see her some day, when she has time?"

"Oh yes, with great pleasure; perhaps not this week—I am so busy; but I won't forget." And with a bright smile Margaret tripped away by her father's side.

"A cousin of Mrs. Hope's, papa; who can she be?"

"I cannot say, my dear, I am sure; but most likely some Scotch girl, and the Bruces are most respectably connected. The young lady probably goes to the Presbyterian church with her aunt,

which explains our not seeing her. Don't forget your promise, Margie. I shall be glad to show Mr. Bruce any civility; it has been difficult hitherto to do that, as he so resolutely refuses dining with us, or any attention of that sort. And, Margaret, I have a long list of visits I want you to make with me; so hold yourself free for the next two or three afternoons."

"Miss Hope, or Bruce, then, will have to wait some time, papa; and do you know how soon the holidays will bring home the boys? I think if Dicksie has an invitation anywhere, it will be much better that he should go; for I do fear, papa, that mamma is weaker than she was at Midsummer, and the boys make such a noise in the house, poor fellows. Dicksie is the worst, though he is such a darling. Merivale and Freddie are always quieter without him, to say nothing of this sprite in knickerbockers. Just look at him, papa; how he is racing down Dewsbury Hill."

"You are early to-day, Herbert," was his father's greeting, as a boy of nine years old dashed up to his sister with a swing that nearly upset her. "Come now, don't be restive. Why are you out of school before twelve?"

"The French master was ill, and didn't come; so our class got leave to be off. Isn't it jolly?"

"Herbert, please remember mamma has a bad headache to-day, and do amuse yourself out of doors till dinner."

"Yes, all right. I have got a target set up in the yard for my new bow and arrows. I am painting it myself. Good-bye;" and the long thin legs, in their light grey stockings, were seen scudding along the road towards Linden Villa.

"How handsome he looks," said Margaret, turning for a minute to watch her favourite skimming over the path. "I hope he won't disturb mamma."

"Your mother is not really weaker, Margie," said Mr. Bromfield, taking up a part of his daughter's speech, which had evidently made an impression he did not like to acknowledge. "Dr. Hastings says, looking back three years to the time when we first came here, the improvement is decided. Doctors know best."

"Not always," said Margaret. "Dr. Hastings was wrong about Mary."

"That was quite a different case," said Mr. Bromfield, almost sharply. "Poor Mary's was consumption, your mother is not in a consumption; she is only weak and fragile, as she has been all her life. Her chest may not be sound—few

people's are, for that matter ; but I expect in a year or two we shall see a change for the better. Havensmouth climate is famed for what it effects in cases like hers, Dr. Hastings says. Now here we part. I may not be home by half-past one ; do not wait luncheon for me, but see that some of the white soup is kept hot."

So father and daughter parted—he with an undefined fear at his heart, which would assert itself against Dr. Hastings in spite of himself ; she with a sense of responsibility upon her, and the pressing claims of four young brothers, the continual assistance her father needed in his district, and her invalid mother's evidently declining state lying upon her. But the burden did not press on Margaret Bromfield as it would have pressed on many girls of her age. A bright elastic temper, not over-sensitive feelings, and a large measure of self-reliance helped her onward. She had plenty of common sense, and her judgment was good. Perhaps she was a little too much inclined to assert herself, and there was a touch of patronage in her manner when with young ladies of her own age, which they resented, but their mothers held her up as a model daughter, and Miss Bromfield was often quoted as a pattern to girls who were addicted to dreaming over story

books of a morning, and were restless if every July afternoon did not bring a croquet party, or every winter evening a dance.

True to her promise, Margaret found time to call upon Mrs. Hope's guest in the course of a few days; but when she got to the farm, and was opening the wicket-gate at the side, it suddenly struck her that she did not know Agatha's name. The stiff little door knocker gave an unwilling response to Margaret's attempts to raise it, and to make it sound in a sharp rat-tat. It seemed to say in the muffled thumps it gave on the low door, that it seldom did any duty of the kind, and found the disturbance unpleasant. After a patient waiting the door slowly opened, and Elsie appeared.

"Is Miss Bruce at home?" Margaret inquired.

"There's nobody of that name here," was the response.

"Miss Hope, I ought to say," corrected Margaret. "Is Miss Hope at home?"

"I don't know what you ought to say, Miss," replied Elsie, in her quaint way, "but there's no Miss Hope here either. Mrs. Hope is in the sitting-room, and maybe you will find her answer your errand. Will you walk in?"

Margaret was hesitating, for when she had made visits with her father to Mrs. Hope, at long intervals, she had found conversation very difficult to keep up. But, thinking within herself that it would be scarcely polite to turn away after Elsie's information, she followed her to the door of the parlour.

Mrs. Hope was seated erect at her work-table, busy with the widths of brown linsey, which she was making into a substantial winter's dress. On the low stool by the fire, a book open on her knees, and Shag at her side, sat Agatha. She had just been reading to Mrs. Hope the "Four-fold Aspect," warming into enthusiasm as she went on, and checked and chilled by Mrs. Hope's saying at the conclusion—

"I don't understand it, my dear ; it does not sound to me like poetry."

Like poetry ! Agatha was writhing and shuddering under the remark, and her cheek had scarcely recovered from the flush of vexation when Margaret Bromfield came into the room.

"How do you do, Mrs. Hope ?" said Margaret, in her easy, self-possessed way. "I am come to be introduced to your niece, but I am ashamed to say I could not ask for her by her name, for Mr. Bruce did not mention it."

"Agatha Moore, my cousin; Miss Bromfield," said Mrs. Hope, calmly, laying aside the cumbersome widths of the linsey, and taking up her knitting-needles instead, while Agatha and Margaret exchanged greetings; then a few common-places passed about the walks near Havensmouth, the beauty of the scenery, the salubrity of the air—so mild in winter, so cool in summer.

Margaret Bromfield never failed—as in duty bound—to sound the praises of the place which was her home, but to so many people merely a winter's nest, to which they came like the swallows to southern climes, and migrated again when the summer air blew soft on their distant homes.

"I came to ask you, Miss Bruce—Miss Moore, I mean—whether you will spend a day with me next week. On Tuesday I shall dine early, with Herbert, because papa is engaged that evening to meet some of the clergy at dinner at the Bishop's, who is here this winter. Will you come, then, about one o'clock, and stay till the evening? I can send Watson home with you, if you don't mind walking down the lane."

"Thank you," said Agatha, "I shall be happy to come."

But there was no glow of pleasure, or the look of gratification which Margaret expected

her invitation would produce. She was rather disappointed, and rising soon after, said she must make haste home, the days were so short.

"That great dog is almost too big for the house, is he not?" she said, as she shook Agatha's hand. "I thought he was always at Mr. Bruce's heels. He waits for him outside the church gate."

"Roland is gone to Torminster to-day, to the market there," said Mrs. Hope; "and Agatha and Shag are great friends."

"Yes, very great friends indeed," said Agatha, speaking heartily for the first time since Margaret had come into the room; and Shag thrust his black muzzle into her hand, as if to acknowledge and return the compliment.

"Not at all an attractive girl," was Margaret's inward remark as she left the farm. "And yet, I suppose, she is what would be called pretty, and she looks a thorough lady, which is one comfort, seeing I shall have her on hand now and then throughout the winter."

"Miss Bromfield called to-day, Roland," Mrs. Hope said to her brother, as the usual evening group was gathered round the fire. "She was so kind as to ask Agatha to spend the day at Linden Villa, next Tuesday."

"Well, how did you like Miss Bromfield?" Mr. Bruce inquired of Agatha.

Agatha was not seated on the carpet footstool to-night, but busily engaged at the table putting the finishing touches to a doll she had dressed for little Jessie Page. The task was nearly finished, and Mrs. Hope could no longer doubt that Agatha's hands were good for something more than to lie idly in her lap. The doll was a miracle of perfection in style and appearance, and misdirected as Mrs. Hope thought Agatha's industry was, still she found it impossible not to admire the result.

"Did you like Miss Bromfield?" Mr. Bruce repeated.

"I don't think I did," was the reply at last. "I suppose she meant to be kind, but she is so patronizing that her kindness did not strike me as it should have done."

"What a strange girl you are, Agatha," Mrs. Hope exclaimed. "I don't see much of Miss Bromfield—indeed she very seldom comes here—but I admire her energy, and the way she devotes herself to her four wild little brothers, and waits upon her mother."

Instead of answering this panegyric, Agatha jumped up with the doll in her hand, and kneel-

ing down by Shag's side on the hearth-rug, asked his opinion of it.

"Now, Shag, isn't she pretty, with her red cloak and purple dress looped up, you see, over her striped petticoat, and this bewitching hat, with those feathers I picked up in the farm-yard yesterday, and the lovely muff with the red lining? Shag, do admire it."

Shag, thus appealed to, began to wag his tail, and give every possible sign that he did as he was bid.

"It is rather a pity, my dear," Mrs. Hope said, "isn't it, to spend so much time on a doll for a poor child like Jessie. A common one would have done as well; and it may put ideas about fine dress into the child's mind; besides she is old for a doll."

"She has little enough to amuse her," Agatha answered, "and she is a very imaginative child, and in the long hours she is alone I expect Rose will be a companion to her; and decidedly things that are pretty are better than things that are ugly. If I had dressed Rose in drab and brown, and covered up her hair and face with a great ugly bonnet, it would have only been giving Jessie a model of what she sees every day; and that would have been no pleasure, would it?"

"My dear, I hear Elsie coming in with the supper tray, will you clear away your pieces?"

All this time Mr. Bruce was neither reading nor writing, but, leaning back in his chair, was looking down on the picture at his feet. Agatha, in her pink muslin, with one arm round Shag's neck, with the other holding the doll before his brown eyes for admiration. A smile was on her lips, and her face, radiant with the brightness and animation it so often lacked. As Mr. Bruce looked, the picture was stereotyped in his mind, to be one of a long succession of like images, which in the days that were to come should haunt him with a sense of aching longing he little dreamed of now.

As Elsie entered, setting down the tray with an offended jerk, on the very edge of the table where Agatha's work was strewed, she rose hastily, saying—

"Oh, I am sorry I make you wait a moment; I will soon put them away."

And then the shreds and three-cornered pieces rapidly disappeared in her square work-basket, backed with its crimson lining, and Elsie proceeded to unfold the cloth, and set out the plates and glasses.

"Look, Elsie, is not that a pretty young lady?"

"Too smart by half, for my notions, miss," was the reply; "but any way, senseless puppets may be decked out and get no harm, while creatures with living souls can't *but* be the worse for finery and vanity."

"Oh, Elsie, Elsie, how can you be so hard on my handiwork? You know all the time you think Rose a beautiful lady."

"Good looks is not everything, Miss Moore," said Elsie, with meaning emphasis. "Will you please to take poached eggs for supper to-night, ma'am?" she asked of Mrs. Hope.

"Roland, will you have eggs?" his sister inquired of her brother. "I am afraid you are very tired; these Torminster market-days are always too much for you, I believe."

"On the contrary, I always enjoy them, Grace," he said, rousing himself. "What makes you think I am tired? I have nothing very particular on hand to-night, and have, I suppose, made that an excuse for sitting idle for ten minutes. It was a very full market," he added, "and farmers have no reason to grumble."

"But traditional farmers always do grumble," said Agatha; "don't they?"

He laughed, and said, "Clearly my prophecy is not yet fulfilled; but let us wait and see what a day at Linden Villa brings forth."

The day at Linden Villa brought Agatha more pleasure than she had expected, and in spite of herself she could not help admiring Margaret, when she saw her at home. She seemed so perfectly able to meet all the requirements of her busy life, so little worried by what might be classed amongst the minor trials which, to some natures, are a fretting chain, ever hampering their daily life.

On her arrival at Linden Villa, Agatha was shown into a pretty drawing-room, where in one corner, carefully shaded from draughts by screens and wraps, lay a fragile-looking woman, scarcely past the prime of life, but so thin and worn that she might have been almost any age. Her face was not happy in its expression, and certain lines about the mouth and forehead told of a querulous restlessness, which so many invalids find it hard to repress. Let us judge such gently, and remember how many are the privations of those who linger year after year on the very brink of another world, and with whom the thread on which life hangs, is so tender that it may be snapped at any moment.

Mrs. Bromfield was reading when Agatha entered. A little page-boy had opened the door and announced her, as Watson was otherwise engaged when the bell rang. Advancing to take a tray, on which stood a glass and some thin biscuits, the poor boy unfortunately tripped against a stool, and threw himself and his burden with some force against the end of the grand piano, which juttet out inconveniently.

“Really, Terry, how careless and inconsiderate you are. Where is Watson? and where is Miss Bromfield? Send Susanna here. I cannot bear such a noise. How do you do, Miss Bruce? Margaret will be here directly, I hope. May I trouble you to ring the bell? I can’t imagine where Watson is. I am too weak to bear having visitors shown in on me suddenly. Margaret always sees them in the back drawing-room;” and as the words were spoken in faint complaining tones, Agatha, who felt very uncomfortable, saw, to her infinite relief, the heavy crimson curtain over the folding doors separating the two rooms, lifted, and Margaret appear.

“Mamma, darling, I am so sorry Miss Moore was shown in here,” she began, extending her hand to Agatha as she spoke. “Watson ought not to have let Terry go to the door.”

“No, indeed, Margaret, the boy has given me such a fright, by stumbling with the tray in his hand, and I shall not get over it all day. I think, Margaret, you might manage better. I made an effort to get down before luncheon to-day to please your father, and now I shall suffer for it. You should have some consideration.”

“So I should, mamma; but this was quite an accident. I will send Susanna to you, and you shall have some of that last reviving mixture Dr. Hastings ordered, and I will take Miss Moore to my room. Will you come now?” she said to Agatha.

Agatha was only too glad to find herself out of the room, where she heard the poor invalid’s fretful murmurs still ascending, till Margaret joined her in the hall.

“Margaret! Margaret!” a voice called from a half-open door on the other side of the hall; “is that you?”

“Yes, papa; excuse me one moment,” she said to Agatha, as she obeyed the summons, and presently returned with two or three notes in her hand. “I am sorry to be so busy, especially to-day, when I thought I was sure of a leisure time with you; but I hope you won’t mind. Now we will go upstairs.” But even on the

way there Margaret was again destined to be stopped.

“Look here, Margie, what I’ve been and done!”

“Oh, Herbert, you must go and tell papa directly—he is in the study;” and Margaret looked at the globe of the hall-lamp, which hung suspended by chains over the staircase, and which was starred and cracked in every direction, while some triangular fragments of glass lay on the matting beneath. “How did you do it, Herbert? Indeed, papa will be very much vexed.”

“I was sliding down the bannisters with that alpenstock I found in the box-room the other day. You know it felt rather like sliding down a mountain. I did it three times all right, and it was so jolly, and then, the fourth time, this horrid thing went smash against that stupid globe.”

“I think it is you who are stupid, Herbert, and disobedient, too; for you have been told not to slide down the bannisters. Now you must go and tell papa directly; and pray, Herbert, do be very quiet to-day, if mamma comes in to dinner.”

“Must I go to papa?”

“Yes, this very moment,” said Margaret,

decidedly; and the boy prepared to obey her, with a somewhat rueful face.

At last the two girls found themselves in Margaret's room, and here Agatha was requested to take off her things, and asked if she would mind amusing herself with any of the books while Margaret answered the notes for her father.

Margaret's room was a very comfortable one, and in the large bay window which was, perhaps, rather too large for the size of the room, stood a table covered with books and work, all neatly arranged; while on the shelves, suspended by scarlet ribbons at intervals on the walls, were a great many books, and the vacant spaces were filled up with photographs, in Oxford frames, and two or three illuminated texts. Margaret's special chair and writing-table were by the fire, and here she now sat, her pen moving swiftly over the paper.

"It is a good thing I can write so quickly and so legibly," she said, as the last of the three envelopes was directed, and she jumped up, when a bell rang. "There, that is the luncheon-bell;" and turning round, she saw Agatha was looking intently at the address on one of the envelopes—"The Lady Harriet Greville, ——"

"Do you know that lady?" Agatha asked.

“Oh, yes; she comes to Sanderson’s Hotel for a day or two sometimes, and then she always attends St. Mary’s Church, and sends papa something for his schools or choir. This note is to acknowledge five pounds. Do *you* know her?”

“Perhaps I ought not to say I know her, but she was very kind to me in a railway carriage when I was coming here a few weeks ago, and she gave me some flowers. I thought I had never seen such a beautiful face before, nor heard such a voice.”

“Really! do you think so? Lady Harriet is nice looking, certainly; she has a terrible time with Mr. Greville, I expect, and needs all her sweet temper. He is the most restless, fidgety, disagreeable man. Papa and I met them both at dinner last winter at Sir Henry Sinclair’s. I never go to evening parties on mamma’s account, but sometimes I dine out with papa when he particularly wishes it.”

They were on their way to the dining-room now; and again Agatha forgot to be angry with Margaret’s rather grand talk and patronage, in watching how skilfully she made the dinner pass off pleasantly, which without her presence would have been a troubled scene; for Mrs. Bromfield was nervous and dainty, and her husband was

continually pressing upon her various delicacies which she could not touch ; and then inclined to be angry with Margaret, because the one thing Mrs. Bromfield thought she might have eaten was not there. "Margaret ought to consider more what her mother *could* fancy." Then Herbert was encouraged by his mother to eat what was far from good for him, and to refuse the mutton cutlets, to which Margaret helped him, with a gesture of disgust.

On most days Mrs. Bromfield took her early dinner of invalid delicacies in her own room, and Master Herbert was determined to make the best of his opportunities, and so preferred oyster patties and things of a like kind to plainer fare.

"It is quite absurd being so strict with the child, Margaret," her mother said. "Yes, darling, take some if you wish," as Herbert attacked a dish of light pastry. "This is your dinner, you know."

"And it is well it is not dinner like this every day," said Margaret ; but there was no cloud upon her brow, and no petulance in her tone.

Every now and then Mr. Bromfield jerked out some question to Agatha, and then, when she answered, scarcely seemed to hear her.

Dinner came to an end at last, and then Mrs. Bromfield was led tenderly back to the drawing-room by her husband, orders given that no visitors were to be admitted, and Herbert despatched to school, while Margaret asked Agatha if she would like to walk into Havensmouth, as it was so fine.

If Mrs. Hope knew no one she met in the gay crowd on the Strand, Margaret Bromfield seemed to know every one, and there was scarcely a shop she entered but she had some recognition from acquaintance or friend. Agatha was amused, and found her companion's lively chatter on the way home, about people they had seen, very interesting.

But the greatest surprise was in store, as the two girls passed a carriage standing by the large print-shop and library at the top of the Strand For, as Margaret Bromfield stopped to receive Lady Harriet Greville's kind greeting, Agatha was discovered and remembered at once.

"I am glad to see you again," the sweet voice said. "I often thought of you on your long journey that day."

"Thank you so much," was all Agatha could say. "You brightened a little bit of it for me."

"I am only here for two days, as Miss Brom-

field will tell you," Lady Harriet said; "but perhaps I may return for a longer visit, if the spring is cold. I was at Shadrington Court one day last week, and thought of you. Mr. and Mrs. Fawcett like the place very much."

All this conversation was unintelligible to Margaret, who thought Agatha had had enough attention, so she put in—

"I have just written to you, Lady Harriet, and have given my father's best thanks."

She bowed and smiled, and then, with another good-bye to Agatha, she leaned back in the carriage, and the two girls passed on.

And now Agatha underwent a strict cross-examination about her acquaintance with Lady Harriet; where was Shadrington, who were Mr. and Mrs. Fawcett? And when the details were at last extracted, Margaret exclaimed—

"How odd you did not tell me about yourself before."

"What chance have I had?" said Agatha. "Besides, why should I think you would care for my story?"

"But I do care very much," was the reply; "I hope I shall see a great deal of you. I think we shall suit each other admirably."

Ah, Margaret, was there not a little touch of

worldliness in this? Agatha Moore, in whom Lady Harriet Greville took an interest, and whose home for ten years had been at Shadrington Court, assumed an importance that the poor little cousin of Mrs. Hope's, at St. Mary's Farm, had never, *would* never have attained.

And is there not this same spirit running through many of us—I had almost written *all*?

“Yes, we hear she is a very charming, nice person, and he is really agreeable and gentleman-like; but then one does not meet them at dinners, so it would not do to ask them here.” Or “I should like to ask those girls on Wednesday, for they are really so well educated and so lady-like; but then we did not meet them at the Brownes', or the Medways', or at Lady Saville's, so it cannot be.”

Margaret Bromfield was but following in the track of her elders and superiors, and the atmosphere she lived in at Havensmouth, broken up as it was into its particular sets and cliques, was likely to strengthen her in treading it, which it must be confessed she did, with very determined and unwavering feet.

Agatha returned to St. Mary's Farm that evening, refreshed by the change, but greatly

puzzled when, before she went to bed, she thought over all the events of the day, and especially undecided as to what she really thought of Margaret Bromfield. It seemed to her that she had suddenly been brought into contact with a girl more nearly answering the description of those she had read of, than any she had ever met. Indeed, Agatha's experience of young ladies was limited to Beatrice and Victoria Harrison, and they were of a very different type.

Why was it that she did not feel more drawn towards Margaret? Why was it she had a secret sense of disquiet when she thought of all she had said to her?

"So good and forbearing as she is to her mother; giving up all evening parties that she may always be at hand; so patient with that dreadfully tiresome boy; so quiet and yet so composed in all she says and does; still I don't think I quite like her." And taking out the dry flowers from the pocket of her writing-case, where they were carefully preserved, she kissed them with enthusiasm. "I feel far more as if Lady Harriet had been my friend, though she only said those few words. I wonder if I shall ever see her again. I hope the spring will be a cold one, if it will only bring her here."

And now Agatha's time went on less slowly than before. She began to forget her desire to be a governess, and Mr. Bruce heard no more of the advertisement. Days at Linden Villa were frequent, or she would go in there with Margaret for an hour after church in the morning; and when there were four riotous boys at home for the holidays instead of one, Agatha wondered still more at the elder sister's patience and skilful management of that unruly crew. With it all, Margaret never looked worn or tired, or grumbled, or complained.

Dicksie, and Merrie, and Fred might well tell Agatha in turn, as a private communication, that "Meg was awfully jolly, and that the whole house would stand still without her, and though that little Herbert plagued her so, she was never furious with him."

Agatha could not help thinking that the plaguing process was as much pursued by the elders as by the youngest of the family; but she did not offend them by saying so.

Meantime, Jessie Page was not forgotten, and she learned to listen for Agatha's footstep, and her little pale face would brighten, when she saw her, in a way that was new and delightful to her. And Johnnie would respectfully touch his cap

when he met Agatha, and thank her for her goodness to poor Jess.

Visits to the old man Mr. Bruce had spoken of, Agatha found less palatable. She could not dress dolls for him, or make him anything pretty to wear, as she had done for Jessie; and old Bunting was apt to growl over small grievances, and to indulge in wearisome accounts of his rheumatics, and display his swelled finger and wrist-joints to excite his young visitor's sympathy. Then he would say he was hard of hearing, "Miss must please to sit close to him;" and Agatha, by reason of certain odours of tobacco and snuff, preferred keeping at a more respectful distance.

But it was very different when she went to see Jessie, who got a cough in the winter, and could not leave the cottage for an expedition with Johnnie to the cove. She made her a warm frock of dark grey linsey, and trimmed it, much against Mrs. Hope's advice, with a bright blue braid. "The black is the same price," Agatha argued, "and the blue is so much prettier. Why should she not have it?"

Then Jessie sat for her portrait, with the doll on her knee. And Agatha made a very fair sketch, which she copied, and gave to Johnnie

for a Christmas present. And she taught Jessie to crochet, with an ivory hook and coarse cotton, and heard her say a hymn and read a few verses from the Bible—the Bible, as yet a sealed book to Agatha, as to thousands and tens of thousands who daily hear it read, or read it for themselves. Sometimes she was arrested by a passage as the words left her lips, and especially when reading to Jessie her favourite Gospel narratives. The words of Him who spake as never man spake, touched her as no other's words did, while the simple, childlike remarks little Jessie would make often strengthened the effect.

Sometimes Agatha would feel a strong wish to speak of longings and desires which began faintly to assert themselves, but reserve and shyness kept her silent. Mr. Bruce had once spoken to her of religion as a personal matter, but only once. Very often days would pass on, and merely the common remarks of daily life would pass between them. He would sit writing or reading in the long evenings, and walk to and from church with Agatha on Sundays, and sometimes on week days; and though he used to talk to her then more or less, it was always on indifferent subjects—of books, or of what was passing in the

world, or about her drawing, and the sketches she made. As the long winter wore away, it seemed to Mrs. Hope that Roland was more and more abstracted and silent, and the thought would cross her mind that Agatha's presence was a restraint, and that her brother felt it to be so. So many things in Agatha jarred against Mrs. Hope's notions. The answer to her question, for instance, of why she preferred St. Mary's to the Scotch Church, quickly and unhesitatingly given, shocked her—"Because Mr. Bromfield's sermons are so much shorter than Mr. MacPherson's, and the curate's shorter still." Then her little careless habits, and the unconcerned way in which she would sit and write when Mrs. Hope was working, and to the question, "What are you writing, Agatha?" she would answer, "Oh, only for amusement."

"So different to my ideas of what a useful young woman should be," Mrs. Hope said one evening to Mr. Bruce, when Agatha was absent at Linden Villa; "to sit writing or reading to herself is really a breach of good manners."

"Why, Gracie, you have allowed me to do the like so many years unmolested and uncomplained of."

"You, Roland; as if Agatha Moore were

to be compared with you. She is a strange girl, not without her attractions, and she can be winsome when she likes, but she is not what I should have wished a daughter of my own to grow up, if God had seen fit to grant me one. Poor Agatha has a dreamy, purposeless way of spending her time, I fear."

"I think you are hard on her, Grace; she has been unflinching in her kindness to little Jessie Page since she first visited her, and even old Bunting has a word to say in her praise."

"Oh, she can do what she finds pleasant to herself, Roland, I do not doubt; but when I took her round to see my poor people in East Havensmouth one day, she stood outside the doors while I went in, and complained of the close smells and want of air, and the dirtiness of the children."

Mr. Bruce smiled. "Well, Grace, in the latter complaint, I am sure I have often heard you unite."

CHAPTER V.

THE SISTER'S WALK.

“ Master ! what shall I do ?
Choose Thou for me.”

“ Set Thou my work,
Lest 'neath the task, self chosen, though for Thee
Sin still may lurk ;
And I may see Thine angel in the way,
With righteous sword mine evil will to slay.”

It was a bright evening late in May, when Roland Bruce, sitting at his study-window above the entrance door, was looking down upon the grass-plot beneath him, with an abstracted gaze. Every now and then Agatha's voice reached him, singing fragments of songs, or holding conversations with Shag, as she consulted him about the shape of the little flower-beds she was marking out on the grass. For she had obtained leave that day from Mrs. Hope to cut some flower-beds there, and Margaret Bromfield had promised her some slips of Tom Thumb geraniums, heliotrope, and calceolaria.

“What a change it will make, Shag, won't it? when there is a blaze of scarlet and yellow here instead of this dull blank of long grass, and we'll make old Philip cut it so smooth; if only the sun will come in enough, but those dear old grey walls, though highly venerable and respectable, Shag, are very inconvenient. But what a glorious sunset there must be over Dartmoor. Come, Shag, let us go up to St. Mary's Hill and see it. To-morrow we will cut out the turf, and then we will begin to plant.”

Shag, who had listened to all this conversation with earnest eyes, and whenever his name was spoken stood on the alert and wagged his tail, now at the mention of a run began to caper and give his low bark; while Agatha pulled off her thick gloves, and laid them on the wide stone window-sill, and letting down her lilac and white alpaca dress, which had been carefully looped up, opened the wicket-gate to pass out. Suddenly a thought seemed to strike her, “It is a good opportunity! wait a minute, Shag;” and running into the house, she was upstairs and in her own room, and tapping at Mr. Bruce's study door before he could have believed it possible. He had only just reseated himself in the chair from which he had a moment before hastily risen with

the half-formed words on his lips, "It is better not," when the light tap was heard.

"May I come in a minute?"

"Certainly, and Shag too, that traitor and deserter; why, old fellow," as Shag squatted at his side, "you have forsaken me of late."

Agatha meanwhile stood irresolute, a roll of paper in her hand, from which she was nervously taking the string which was tied round it, and after a moment's silence said, "Would you mind looking over this some day, and if you think it good enough will you send it to a publisher for me, and inquire if he will print it?"

Mr. Bruce held out his hand for the roll, and said, "This is rather longer than your advertisement for the 'Times.'"

"Please don't laugh at me, I have quite given up that idea. I had far rather stay here than be a governess; but this is what I have been writing at odd times the last few months. I don't know if it is very good, still I think worse tales are published and sold, and I should like to try my fortune. You who write so much, must be able to tell me whether it is hopeless expecting any one to take the manuscript and give me something for it. Will you read it?"

"Yes, with pleasure; it is a very fair, neat

manuscript, and that is always a recommendation. But I must have time; of course you will leave it with me."

"Oh, yes. Mrs. Hope is at church this evening; and Shag and I are going to St. Mary's Hill. Won't you come too?"

"I am afraid I cannot; though I must ask you to stay a little longer, while I tell you about a letter I had this morning: it concerns you, it is from Mr. Harrison."

"From Uncle Robert! is he ill? I heard from Beatrice last week, they were then at Lucerne."

"Yes, and they are there now. No one is ill; but Mr. Harrison has had some more very serious money losses. It seems that besides the investment in the railways, which proved so unfortunate, he collected a great deal of what may be called his floating capital, and placed it in one of these large Limited companies. The whole is lost, and not only so, the little fortune from which your income is derived is gone also. He believed so completely in the safety of this company, that he removed your little fortune, of which he was trustee, from the funds, and placed it with his own. The wreck is complete; Shadrington Court, and the landed property sur-

rounding it, will be saved, but very little more. Will you like to read the letter?" he asked, offering it to her; "I am so sorry to have to tell you what I know you will feel very much."

Agatha took the letter from Mr. Bruce, her hand trembled, and her cheek was first flushed and then very pale. "Poor Uncle Robert; oh I am so grieved for him," she said, as she returned it to Mr. Bruce; "but I must write to him, and tell him not to think about my loss, which seems to vex him more than his own. I do not mind, except that now of course, I must go away from here, and not burden you and Mrs. Hope any longer. Perhaps you will advise me what is best to do. I could perhaps go as a daily governess to Havensmouth. Margaret Bromfield told me the other day how well these sort of governesses are paid here, especially in winter. I hope you will help me, and tell me what you think is best."

"Yes, I will, and it is very easy for me to do so. Grace and I both hope you will not let this loss make any difference in your feelings about staying with us. I have been very prosperous of late; the farm has been productive, and my papers on various agricultural subjects have been

well paid for. If, as you said not five minutes ago, you would far rather stay here than be a governess, I hope you will not change your mind. You cannot possibly outstay your welcome."

"Thank you; it is very kind of you to say so. But I don't think I could stay, to be entirely dependent on kindness I do not deserve." And the sad tone of the voice telling the old tale of wounded pride struck on Mr. Bruce's ear painfully. "Come, Shag," she said, after a moment's silence, during which Mr. Bruce was calmly unrolling the manuscript, as if prepared to read it at once—"come, Shag, we may as well go and see the sun set behind Dartmoor," and then she was gone.

Shag looked wistfully at his master, but on hearing the words, "Yes, old fellow, go, and take care of her," he pattered after Agatha, and Mr. Bruce was alone.

He sat for some minutes musing as she left him. Over his fine face many and varied expressions passed. "Only six months ago," he said at last, "and I could not have believed this possible. I that have suffered once, am I really in earnest, and can I wish to suffer again in the same way?" And then before him rose a vision

of the past of a tall graceful figure, and a face of womanly beauty; a mouth wreathed with smiles, and eyes that somehow never answered them, but ever looked out on him and all the world with a cold, changeless light. He seemed to hear the tones of the voice which had, perhaps, more than anything else led him captive; and then he recalled the joy he had felt when that voice whispered to him that he was dear to her—to her from whom he had felt himself so immeasurably separated by inferiority of age, by everything. Then the bitter awakening, the flight of the summer bird, when storms gathered over him; of the false-hearted woman who had drifted away from him when the billows swelled, and had so calmly moored her bark in another haven, leaving him with hopes crushed, and health, as it seemed, for ever gone—to live or die—it was nothing more to her, the lady of Glenbarrow, the mistress of the home of his ancestors as well as of her husband's. And by the side of this picture culled from out the past arose another—of the sudden possession taken of his chair one October evening by a slender girl, with a wealth of brown hair gathered back from a pale, tired face, his sister kneeling at her feet and holding the wine to her, and the efforts she made to

rouse herself and smile. Poor desolate child! he had then said to himself, and he recalled how even then the longing arose that she should be happy with them in their quiet, homely life, and find rest and enjoyment too. Then all her little outspoken speeches returned to him, and her curious unwillingness to mould herself to any given model. Her shrinking, with the shrinking of a proud sensitive nature, from patronage when Miss Bromfield first noticed her, her fear of being a burden to Grace and to him—to him! At this point of the meditation an expression of mingled tenderness and pain passed over him; he covered his face with his hands for a minute's space; then he took up the manuscript before him very gently, and bent it back to facilitate reading it, touching it as if it were something too precious to be lightly handled, and soon his countenance assumed all its usual quiet and firm expression, and he read page after page of the clear, legible handwriting, without looking up or noticing how time was passing. He did not see how the glory had faded from the western sky, how a flock of rosy clouds just before the window had paled and vanished, and the moon, nearly full, had risen over the tree tops to the left of the farm. The light still

sufficed by the open window to read by, and when at last it failed him, and he was rising to light the lamp which he used in his study, Mrs. Hope entered.

“Roland, do you know where Agatha is? I have been home from church for the last hour, supper is ready, and she is not come in. Really her unpunctuality is very trying. Moreover, girls wandering out by themselves is not according to my notions, at least not in the dark.”

“In the dark, Grace; why, it can hardly be called dark all night at this time of year. Agatha Moore was here this evening about half-past six or seven, and I told her about Mr. Harrison’s letter.”

“What did she say?”

“Not much. She left me, with Shag to take care of her, to go to the top of St. Mary’s Hill to watch the sun set behind Dartmoor, she said. But,” referring to his father’s large old-fashioned watch, which sent out a sonorous tick as he took it from his pocket, “I see it is nearly nine. I will walk down the lane and meet Agatha.”

“Perhaps you are tired; you were up before five this morning, Roland, and you were standing at the sheep-shearing most of the day. Let

Elsbeth or Philip go. I dare say she is at the Pages' cottage, reading story-books to Jessie."

Her tone was a little contemptuous. Mrs. Hope was tired if her brother was not; she had finished a busy day by a walk to her own church for the week-day evening service, and Agatha had been so obstinate in carrying her point about the flower-beds, and had left her paint-box and drawing-paper on the table in the sitting-room, with the coloured water in a blue mug; and Mrs. MacPherson had called, and she had been so ashamed of the untidy appearance of everything; so altogether Mrs. Hope was not in the mood to smile at Agatha's absence beyond the prescribed hour.

Mr. Bruce and his sister went downstairs together; the doors at both ends of the house stood open, and just as Roland was taking his wide-awake to stroll out into the garden, where all the crescents and stars were marked out on the grass by pegs and string, Shag dashed down the passage from the back entrance, and sprang to his master's side.

"Ah, Shag! I was just coming to look after you. What is it, Shag, old fellow?" for Shag's excitement seemed to increase. He whined, and gave the short low bark which is so familiar a

sound on the moors and mountains of Scotland, when the shepherd sends his faithful dog to look for a stray sheep and drive it home.

Mr. Bruce repeated the question, "What is it, Shag, and why are you come home so long before your mistress?"

"Mistress! 'deed!" murmured Elsie, as Mr. Bruce passed out through the kitchen. "It has come to that, has it, then?"

While Mrs. Hope followed with the inquiry, "Where is Mr. Roland gone, Elsie? Is not Miss Moore come back?"

"No, I have not seen her, though maybe she's just at the gate a-dabbing at them colours, and taking pictures of the hen-house."

"Not now, surely," Mrs. Hope said, looking across the yard, and seeing nothing of either Shag or his master. "I do not understand it at all."

"No, nor I neither, ma'am. Missie is altogether a lassie past the comprehension of common folks like me, though there's Philip talking about the flower-beds she is going to dig out of the grass quite pleased, and is going up the first thing to-morrow with the barrow to get some plants from the minister's daughter. But men are always poor feeble-minded creatures—if the

Scripture did not forbid, I'd say fools—where bit lassies who can speak you soft to get their own way, is concerned."

Meanwhile, Mr. Bruce followed Shag's lead, fully expecting that he would pause at the Pages' cottage, where Johnnie's whistle was heard, as he cleared up the tools with which he had been working in his mother's strip of garden, and prepared to go in-doors to bed.

"Have you seen Miss Moore this evening, Page?" Mr. Bruce asked.

But Johnnie said, "No, sir," with a touch of his cap. "The young lady was here this morning, Jessie told me, but I have not heard of her calling in since. Jess is in bed and asleep, sir, but I can ask mother."

"No, no," said Mr. Bruce, for Shag did not seem pleased at the delay, and began to whine and jump up at his master again, running on to the gate leading to the cove, and then back to Mr. Bruce, with the same low, deep-mouthed bark. "Johnnie, come with me, will you? I begin to think Shag has some good reason for urging me onwards. He left the farm with Miss Moore an hour or two ago, and has returned without her." While he spoke, Mr. Bruce was striding on at a pace to which Johnnie could

only keep up by something between a trot and a run. Not a word more was spoken for some time, except when Shag had bounded onwards towards the cliff, and followed the narrow winding path cut along the sides of the hills overhanging the sea to the right, instead of going down to St. Mary's Cove, when Mr. Bruce exclaimed, "The Sister's Walk! There is something wrong."

The Sister's Walk skirted the sea at the height of many hundred feet; it was narrow, and in some places precipitous, rising and falling with the curves of the hills, and winding in and out along the deep indentations of the coast. It was very little frequented, though shortly mentioned in the guide-books as a picturesque route from St. Mary's to Dunster Cove, from whence some of the finest views in the neighbourhood could be obtained. Nevertheless, few visitors at Havensmouth trod the uneven rugged path, but preferred going to Dunster Cove by the shorter and easier way further inland. To Mr. Bruce and Shag the Sister's Walk was familiar ground, and, several times since Agatha had been at the farm, Mr. Bruce had taken her to good points for sketching, and had brought her round to Dunster Cove, and

home to St. Mary's Farm by the road. The sides of the hills were covered on these May days with gorse, a blaze of golden glory in the sunshine, and showing even now with a chastened beauty in the moonlight, which, as Mr. Bruce and Johnnie passed, streamed on the hill on one side, and made a radiant way across the calm sea on the other. Below, the waves murmured their ceaseless song, and broke gently on the masses of grey rock, down to which the green beauty of the hills crept, even to the brink of the stern limestone, which rose so abruptly from the shore in some places, that it defied the drapery of hardy hart's-tongue and pendant ivy to come further.

About midway between St. Mary's Cove and Dunster a curious cluster of rock cropped out in the track, and the topmost mass was shaped and fashioned by the hand of Nature into what was called "The Sister's Chair." Back, seat, and twisted arms could all be traced, and here Agatha had climbed, with her light, quick step, and had challenged Mr. Bruce to mount too the last time they had come this way together. As the great grey mass stood out before him in the moonlight, Mr. Bruce remembered this, and recalled the merry laugh which greeted his rather scam-

bling ascent to the high position she had so easily gained, and how he had left her there to sketch, with an order to Shag to stay behind and bring her home safely.

At the foot of the Sister's Chair Shag now stopped, and waited for his master to come up, giving a low whine with his nose in the air, and looking up with imploring eyes into Mr. Bruce's face. "Where is she, Shag?" and then he called "Agatha! Are you here, Agatha?"

There was no answer but the water lapping on the stones below, and the heavy sonorous hum of the cockchafers as they wheeled around with awkward, cumbrous wing. The masses of rock were cleft in small fissures, and jutted out irregularly on the further side from where Mr. Bruce stood, and formed a sort of steep and difficult staircase by which the Sister's Chair was reached. As he went round to that side, Mr. Bruce's heart misgave him that he should find Agatha lying on the ground. But no! he stumbled over something, which proved to be a book she had taken with her on her walk, but that was all. "Agatha! Agatha!" he called again, and this time the tone of his own voice startled even himself. It was a cry of agonizing suspense rather than a call. Again no answer but the

lapping of the water on the stones below, and the drowsy hum of the insects which haunt the summer night.

But presently, as he was about to ascend by the rough steps I mentioned, Johnnie Page's voice was heard from the top, to which he had climbed with swift and steady step from the other side, "Here, sir! here. Miss Moore is here, but she does not speak or move."

Roland sprang up, he scarcely knew how; for a moment all his courage and strength seemed to have died out of him, and once more the same cry rose in the stillness of the evening air, "Agatha! Agatha!"

She could neither hear nor answer. In stepping down, apparently, from the Sister's Chair, her foot had caught between two fragments of rock, and she had been unable to extricate it. She had fallen, and evidently had no power to raise herself; she was lying partly supported by the large stone which formed the footstool of the Sister's Chair, her pale face turned up in the moonlight, and her fair forehead contracted with pain—the pain which she had borne alone under the blue sky for so long, and had at last lost consciousness from the very acuteness of the suffering she was enduring.

"Stop, sir, stop!" Johnnie exclaimed, as Mr. Bruce was going to raise her. "Look here, sir, her foot is wedged in between these here pieces of stone, and we had better set that free before she is moved. If she's twisted round, sudden-like, the ankle will break, if it isn't broken already."

"Yes, you are right, Johnnie;" and, with a strong effort Roland Bruce was himself again. With an inward cry to the Strong for strength he gained the victory, and set about devising the best plan to liberate Agatha. "We must knock off that rugged corner of stone in the crevice, Johnnie," he said. "Have you a knife?"

The boy produced a large clasp knife, with a strong horn handle, and by slow, very slow degrees, as it seemed to them, the fragment of rock was reduced in size by repeated blows. Then Mr. Bruce lifted the little imprisoned foot and gently set it at liberty. But a moan of pain from Agatha showed that it was really injured. A shudder passed over her, and she murmured, "Shag, Shag, don't go away and leave me alone." Poor Shag, who had sat mute by her side while his master and Johnnie were knocking the stone, now replied to Agatha's call by

rubbing his nose against her hair and licking her hand.

"You are not alone, now," Mr. Bruce said, raising her gently. "I am here, and, when you can bear it, I will take you home."

Agatha, who was struggling back to consciousness, and was following out the thoughts she had been thinking as she had sat in the Sister's Chair, with Shag for her only companion, said, "Home. I have no home. You know Uncle Robert has——" Then, trying to recover herself, she said, "Am I talking nonsense? Oh! the pain has been so dreadful, and the fear worse. I could not bear being alone, the daylight fading away, and you know," she added, sadly, "I never feel the rest you said would make me happy, that Sunday long ago."

"Do not talk," Mr. Bruce answered; "I am afraid the movement will give you pain, but the sooner it is done the better, and I will carry you as carefully as I can. Johnnie Page is here, and will go before me and clear the way, so that I may not stumble. Are you ready?"

"Yes," she said. "The pain is very bad even now, but it is nothing now you are come, and I am not alone. Only please will you look if I have dropped a book. I had just missed

it, and was going down to look for it, when my foot got into that crack, and I fell. I would not lose it for the world."

"The book is safe; I picked it up at the foot of the rock. Now will you trust me?"

Mr. Bruce raised her in his arms, but a sharp cry of pain escaped her. "Is it so bad?" he asked.

"Yes, but I will try to bear it. Please don't mind, but go on."

There was nothing else to be done, and, when the rugged descent from the Sister's Chair was accomplished, the worst seemed over. Johnnie went first, and helped Mr. Bruce to avoid the irregularities of the path. The moonlight favoured them, and Agatha's small figure was really of little weight. Mr. Bruce carried her as easily as he would a child. He had great muscular strength, and he was calm and resolute once more, neither hurrying nor seeming hurried in voice or manner, but making his way homewards with a steadfast even pace. But he could scarcely bear to hear the poor child's suppressed moan, nor to feel her small hand clench his shoulder with a convulsive grasp, and her slight frame quiver if any unavoidable jar in his progress shook the injured foot. Nor to hear her faintly-whispered

question, fainter and fainter every time it was asked, "Are we near home, now? How much further?"

At last she said, "Say something to help me—a verse—poetry—anything, please; you know so much. I can't think of anything now—but this pain, this pain!"

He did not reply directly. She thought he took no notice of her request; but struck afresh with that wonderful adaptation to the needs of the hour which the Psalms appointed for our daily use so often develope, he began in a slow measured strain to repeat the first verse of the 142nd Psalm for the 29th evening of the month. The deep sonorous tone, with the Scotch accent, gave the words their full power:—"I cried unto the Lord with my voice; yea, even unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaints before Him, and showed Him of my trouble. When my spirit was in heaviness Thou knewest my path. I cried unto Thee, O Lord, and said, Thou art my hope, and my portion in the land of the living. Consider my complaint, for I am brought very low."

He stopped, but she whispered, "Go on, please go on. It is a psalm, isn't it? I never thought they were so beautiful." And in the

same deliberate way Mr. Bruce went through the next psalm. Agatha was never to forget the words as she heard them then.

“I stretch forth my hands unto Thee, my soul gaspeth unto Thee as a thirsty land. Hear me, O Lord, and that soon, for my spirit waxeth faint. Hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth Thee, for Thou art my God. Let thy loving Spirit lead me forth into the land of righteousness. Quicken me, O Lord, for thy Name's sake, and for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble. And of thy goodness slay mine enemies, and destroy all them that vex my soul; for I am thy servant.”

“They are beautiful words,” she whispered again. “Oh, I wish, I wish I knew them, and felt them as you do.”

“God's words are always better than man's,” he answered. “We cannot know them too well, or think of them too often.”

He spoke no more then, and soon they reached the well-known gate opening into the lane leading to St. Mary's Farm. “We shall soon be at home,” he said cheerfully, but Agatha did not answer.

Johnnie was now directed to run on, and tell

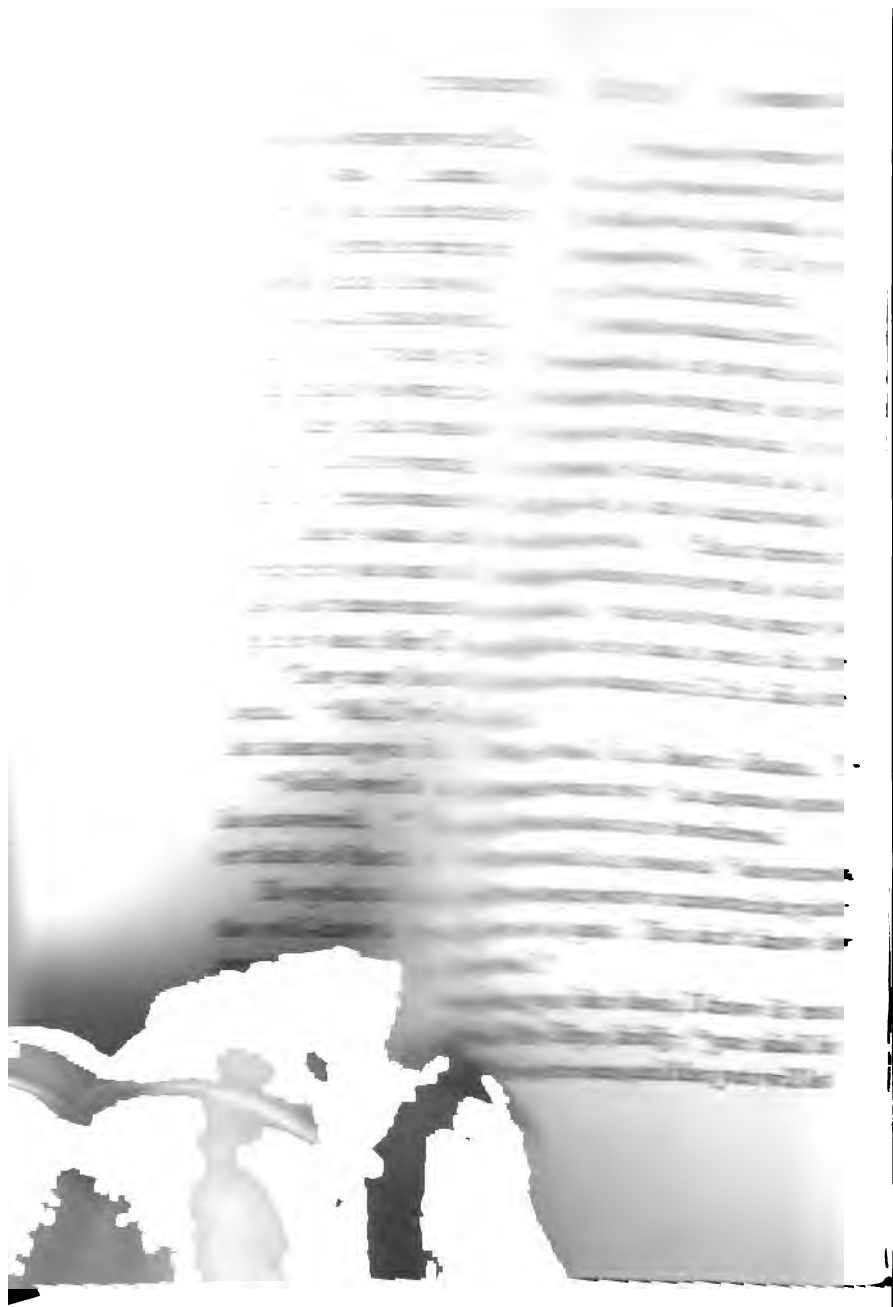
Mrs. Hope that Miss Moore had fallen down and hurt her foot, and then he was to go as quickly as possible to summon a surgeon from St. Mary's Road, the nearest available, and beg him to come directly to the farm.

When Mr. Bruce reached the wicket-gate, Mrs. Hope was standing there, and exclaimed, "Carrying her, Roland! and all the way from the Sister's Chair! You have always been warned against too great or too sudden exertion."

"Hush! Grace," he said, almost sternly. "It is no time to think of ourselves; she is very much hurt, and has, I think, fainted for the second time from the pain she has tried to bear so bravely. Is her room ready? I had better take her there at once; and, Grace, get some restorative immediately."

"Poor lassie! poor child!" said Mrs. Hope, melted at the sight of the white unconscious face of which she caught a glimpse as Mr. Bruce turned into the house. "Elsie and I will do our best for her," she said, as she gave the old servant orders, and followed her brother with a candle up the steep stairs.

"Now, Roland, do go and get something yourself, and rest," as he laid his burden on the bed. "Where is she hurt?"



him see what is really amiss, won't you? Roland, do go and rest," she said, entreatingly; "you can do nothing here."

Mr. Bruce turned to obey, but Agatha called him. "Are you very tired? I am sure you must be. Thank you so much, and Shag, dear, dear old Shag, thank him for coming to fetch you."

Mr. Bruce took her hand in his for a moment, and then left the room without a word, and went into his study to await the doctor's arrival. On his table lay the roll of manuscript he had been reading only two hours before. How long ago it seemed. Shag watched all his master's movements, as he lighted the lamp, swallowed the wine which had been put there for him, and sank down in his chair, folding his hands behind his head, and closing his eyes; for, now the need for exertion was over, he felt that he was tired. Shag's paws on his knees roused him, and the poor dog was wholly unprepared for the attention now bestowed on him.

"Ah, you good dog—you dear old fellow!" Mr. Bruce said, "to come home and call me, Shag. But she told me to thank you. Good boy—good Shag! You and I are her only friends here, Shag—her only friends; but you and I under-

stand each other, don't we, Shag? Dear Shag; my faithful and best of dogs!" And to judge by Shag's expressive gestures, we may believe that Mr. Bruce was right—they understood each other perfectly.

"A dislocation of the ankle, and a small bone broken, a severe sprain as well, and some fear of inflammation from the length of time which had elapsed between the accident and the surgical aid needed in these cases." Such was Mr. Hall's report, delivered in orthodox medical style to Mr. Bruce as, after an hour's attendance in Agatha's room, he prepared to leave the farm. "The young lady bore the pain I was obliged to inflict bravely; really in a very remarkable way. She is much exhausted now, and for some days she must be kept in the strictest quiet, and perfect rest of the leg."

"Her suffering was very great, I am afraid, on the way home. I carried her from the Sister's Chair."

"Unquestionably; every step must have given her agony. The injured foot hanging down for so long a time, is doubtless the cause of the swelling and inflammation."

"You do not anticipate any lasting ill effects, I hope?"

“Oh no; but these cases are always tedious, and require much attention and good nursing, which I am sure will be given here. What a magnificent night it is,” said Mr. Hall. “The hay looks well, but I don’t think you have much grass, have you?”

“No; I use the few acres of land mostly for pasturage, and a little wheat in the level between this and Sir Maurice Law’s plantation.”

“Ah, Sir Maurice has a good tenant in you, Mr. Bruce; you must have trebled the value of this land. When I was a boy——” and Mr. Hall, who was a grey-haired man, proceeded to go over many old details about Sir Maurice Law’s property in the first place, and of the rapid growth of Havensmouth in the second, Mr. Bruce sauntering by his side to the gate of the quadrangle, where he at last, to his great relief, bid the doctor good-night.

“I will see the young lady early in the morning. I hope she will get a fair night, with the help of the little draught I have given her;” and these were *at last* the last words.

“What a bore it is when people talk for the sake of hearing their own chatter,” thought Mr. Bruce, as he turned to cross the road and re-enter the house.

He found Mrs. Hope in the sitting-room, calmly and deliberately eating the supper which had been so long delayed. There was no sign of excitement or flurry about her, and she gave her brother a matter-of-fact account of the state of poor Agatha's foot, the difficulty with which the boot had been cut off, the pain which the setting the displaced bone had caused, and the self-control Agatha had shown.

"It has raised her in my opinion. I must say there was something very winning in the way in which she said, just now, she was sorry to give me and Elsie so much trouble, and begged us not to think of sitting up with her. And I don't know that it is necessary, she is more likely to go to sleep if left alone. Mr. Hall has left her a composing draught."

"I think Elsie ought to sit up with her, or sleep in her room, even if you cannot, Grace."

"Well, we will see. Roland, you are not well, you can eat nothing."

"I am perfectly well," he said, sharply. "It is too late for prayers to-night, I suppose, so I will bid you good-night."

"Good-night," she said, as they exchanged the kiss, without which they never separated. But a certain strange, weary look in his face did

not escape her keen glance. "He has overtaxed himself to-night," she said, as he left the room, "carrying that poor girl all that way. If harm befalls him through her, how hard it would be. And he looked so like his mother to-night."

Many weary days and nights followed for poor Agatha. The weather had set in for real undoubted summer, and May melted into June with cloudless skies and glowing sunshine, which were oppressive to Agatha imprisoned in the high, old-fashioned bed, where, as there was no sofa in her room, she had to lie, after Mr. Hall allowed her to be dressed, and from which she could only see the tops of the trees, and the snowy wings of two or three gulls crossing the blue sky in their flight seaward. It was dull to lie all day listening to sounds of busy life borne in through the open window—the cows lowing, the fowls cackling in the farmyard, the bees humming amongst the bushes of lavender which grew under the windows. Agatha gathered a few books on her bed and made an effort to work a little, but very often she would lie, listless and tired, by the hour together, tears gathering in her eyes and falling down her cheeks from the very feeling of weakness and inaction which is so hard for the young to bear. Mrs. Hope came

in often to ask her how she was, to move her pillows, and to remark on the beauty of the weather, and to offer to read to her. But the books she chose were to Agatha's mind intensely uninteresting, and she fell asleep before Mrs. Hope had turned over many pages.

Then Elspeth, who was really full of compassion for her in her honest old heart, thought it necessary to keep up her dry, sententious way of addressing her, and all the dusting and tidying operations which she performed twice a day in Agatha's room, were interspersed with pithy remarks on the vanities of the world, the folly of the young, and the wholesome effects of pain and trouble.

Margaret Bromfield came to inquire for her, and so did her father, but when Mrs. Hope asked her if she would like to see them, she shrank from it, and said, "No." At last Margaret wrote her a note, which she sent up, and told Elspeth to say she was waiting for an answer. It was only a few lines in her clear handwriting, telling her that she must let her come up; she was used to invalids, as Agatha knew, and nothing was so bad for the spirits as loneliness and time to brood over one's troubles. Agatha was ashamed to refuse, and in another

minute Margaret came into her room bright and self-possessed as ever.

“You naughty child, to keep me away so long. Now,” taking out her watch, “I have just three-quarters of an hour to stay, and I mean to amuse you. I won’t talk about your foot; I have heard the story, so it is not worth going over it all.”

“Oh, no,” said Agatha, tremulously, and then she dared not speak again for she felt so inclined to cry. But Margaret’s flow of talk did not fail her. She had stories of Herbert and Merrie at home, of Dicksie and Fred spending their holidays at an uncle’s house in the north of England, of the quarrel there had been between two of the choir at St. Mary’s, of the new curate who had just come, of the slight improvement in her mother’s state, that she had been out twice in a chair, and had coughed so much less than usual, “though I know,” said Margaret, “there are always these deceitful lulls in complaints like hers. It was so with Mary.”

“Was she like you?” Agatha asked as Margaret paused.

“Like *me!* oh, no. She was so beautiful and so gentle and good. I could not tell you how good.”

There was a touch of tenderness in Margaret's voice as she said this, which compelled Agatha to take her hand in hers. It was almost the first time any demonstration of affection had passed between them, and Margaret bent over her and kissed her.

"Yes, Mary had that real living principle within her which made one the better for being with her. I remember my Uncle George saying—the uncle where the boys are staying now—that Mary had gone to the Fountain for the gift of living water, and that it was in her a well of water springing up into eternal life. It was an overflowing stream which refreshed every one about her. I like *her*! No, indeed, I am not."

"But you get through so much, and are so useful and clever, and you are always doing something for others, either at home or amongst the poor. What a different life to mine, who have never done anything for the help of other people. At Shadrington no one ever thought of it. We did our lessons, and I read, and sketched, and practised because I liked it; and I helped Beatrice and Victoria because I liked it too. It was no trouble to me to do their lessons for them sometimes, or to save them from Aunt Anna's wrath by mending their torn frocks,

when if they had asked Harriett to do it she would have told their mother and got them into a scrape. Do you know, Margaret, I envy you your life, so different to my own ; and now I have not a penny in the world except what people give me, I must do something to help myself. The very evening I heard of Uncle Robert's losing the money I hurt my foot, and all my schemes of going for a governess are useless for the present. But when I can walk again will you ask people you know if they would have me to teach their children?"

"Of course I will, if it is necessary. But, Agatha, I will tell you, for your comfort, about doing, and work, and all that. In my secret heart I think it is what people are, more even than what they *do*, which tells. I have dreadful misgivings about myself sometimes, I assure you."

"You!" Agatha's tone expressed the greatest surprise. "You, Margaret!" For Margaret Bromfield had always struck her as so entirely satisfied with the success of her own efforts, so completely happy in spite of trials and difficulties, and what would be to many insurmountable ones too.

"Yes," said Margaret ; "I am telling you the truth about myself. But now that is enough

of so uninteresting a subject. I think I see what you want now—change and variety. My time is nearly up, and I must say good-bye; but I shall come again very soon. Good-bye.”

Margaret found her way to the kitchen, and asked if she might go out that way.

“Of course, miss, if you please,” was Elsie’s answer.

“Mrs. Hope is out, I think?” Margaret inquired.

“Yes, miss; this is Saturday, and she goes to the town on Saturday afternoons.”

“Is Mr. Bruce at home?”

“I should not expect he was; there have been a new flock of sheep driven into the two-acre field this afternoon, and Master Roland has been out with Philip and John Page, counting them and looking into their condition. But as it is close upon six, maybe he won’t be long. Will you go into the parlour and wait?”

“Oh, no, thank you. What beautiful butter that is,” pointing to a grand display of rolls and shapes arranged on three large white dishes. “I don’t know what we should do for our invalid if we could not get St. Mary’s butter and cream—there is none like it.”

“No, I don’t fancy there is,” was Elsie’s

pleased reply. "The butter is like those who own it, it is what it pretends to be. We don't make weight here by lard and flour, and we don't water the milk till it's pretty near drowned. My master and mistress serve their Master with honest service, and so all that they touch prospers, seems to me. Master Roland is coming now, I see;" and as Elsie spoke, Shag cleared the gate leading into the quadrangle with a bound, and Mr. Bruce followed.

Margaret advanced to meet him, and said, in her frank, easy manner, "I am so glad I have met you, Mr. Bruce. I have been to see Miss Moore, and I think she is very dull in that room, and wants variety. Could she not be brought downstairs? and then she might lie out of doors in this lovely weather, and I am sure it would do her good. Please excuse my saying this, perhaps Mr. Hall has ordered her to stay upstairs."

"Oh, no, and I am sure you are right; I will tell my sister what you say. Have you seen the flower-garden you kindly helped to stock?"

"No, I came in this way, and did not remember it; besides, I thought Agatha's illness would have stopped all that reformation."

"Will you come round and see it?"

Margaret assented, and very striking was

the change in the dull level of grass, now all shorn smooth, and cut out into stars and crescents, where the young heliotropes, geraniums, and yellow and rich brown calceolarias, smiled in their opening beauty, encircled by tasteful edges of white and dark-leaved plants, and promising to be a blaze of splendour in autumn days.

“Really, how pretty! and did you do all this to please her? Oh, do let her come down to-morrow, and see it. That long garden seat could have cushions on it, and she could lie there beautifully. Might she not use the sitting-room, too, opposite to the one you generally occupy? The garden can be better seen from there.”

She spoke in her usual way, seeing what was the best thing to be done, and never hesitating to point it out, and expect that those to whom she spoke would do it. But the conversation was heard by Elsie, who was coming up the passage with the tea-things, and many were the significant grunts which the remembrance of it elicited that evening.

“I see where it’s all tending, as plain as I ever saw a poor silly moth fluttering to a candle, and there is the mistress as innocent as a baby; and there’s the spare parlour turning out, and the sofa pulled to the window, and the little table brought down from the master’s bed-room, and

the jars, those real China jars, filled with flowers, and taken down from the chimney-shelf, up to which they'll never get whole any more. Well, well, he is making his own trouble, dear laddie, and he'll have to bear it. Not but what the child has a way with her which is like a glamour. There's old Philip bending his stiff back over the silly gimcracks of flower-beds, and working at them when he ought to have been resting his bones, which are none of the youngest, in his bed. And there's the boy, John Page, trudging after his work is done, backwards and forwards—backwards and forwards—to the minister's house, with the wheelbarrow; and there's me—why, I don't *want* to like the lassie, a little useless bit of a wee thing, just good to prank herself out, and make pictures in that book of hers, and sing and chatter one moment, and get lost in a dream the next. It's contrary to my notions to like a child like that, spoiling the mistress's tidy sitting-room by leaving her fads of things here and there and everywhere; but still, when she looks up and thanks me for what I do, with that smile of hers, or says, 'I am sure you must be tired of waiting on me, Elsie,' why, I can't help myself, I do like her, and I pity her too, poor lonesome little lassie, with neither father nor mother, brother nor sister, and brought

up by vain world-like folks, who never taught her nothing for her lasting good. Still, to see Master Roland, who is next door to a saint, deceiving of himself that she would ever be content to live here, a dull and quiet life, and want nothing more! Why, it's enough to drive a body out of her senses. Ah, well, well, the times of such-like folks as Master Roland are in God's hands; why should I, a poor, erring creature at the best, think I know better than He, who don't let a sparrow fall without his leave."

CHAPTER VI.

A SUMMER'S EVENING DREAM.

“When such partings shall be like a dream,
Which we smile at when the day appears,
And the flashing of new smiles shall seem
Brighter for old tears.
And all rocks shall seem, in looking back,
Upward stairs to reach the heavenly bowers ;
And the thorns that crossed and checked our track
Blossom into flowers.”

E. M. C.

THAT glorious June Sunday, when Agatha was carried down into the garden, and placed upon the seat made ready for her, was the beginning of a long series of days and weeks of which no particular record need be given here. To Mr. Bruce they passed swiftly enough, and were afterwards like a dream when one awaketh.

Agatha's imprisonment to the little square of garden lasted a long time, and then when she began to use her foot again, her step was faltering and feeble, and she could not walk without the support of an arm or the aid of a stick.

Towards the end of August, she was able to get down, with Mr. Bruce's help, to St. Mary's Cove, and Johnnie Page's boat was put into requisition, and he and Jessie, and Mr. Bruce and Agatha, would row out on the calm sea, and cruise round St. Mary's Island, to enjoy the fresh sea breeze; and Agatha would sketch the varied outline of the coast, and little Jessie would drag her hand along in the water as the boat went slowly onwards, and sing her small stock of hymns in the low, childish voice, which seemed to make music with the splash of her brother's oar, and the rippling of the tiny waves against the keel of the boat. However busy the day had been at the farm, Mr. Bruce found time to give himself up to Agatha's amusement in the evening; and as the days shortened, he even prevailed on Mrs. Hope to grant her a cup of early tea before they set out, that there might be nothing to necessitate their return till sunset. To Mrs. Hope's notion of regularity and punctuality this was a great deal to ask of her. Vagrant five o'clock cups of tea were, in her eyes, an absurd innovation, and to no one but to Roland would she have yielded on that point.

One day, the last of August, the weather was oppressively hot; a veil of thin clouds hung over

the sky, and scarcely a breath stirred; the farm people said the long spell of summer was coming to an end, and that a thunder-storm would clear the air, and then there would be a change, and the weather would break up.

Agatha felt dull and oppressed, sitting all the morning in the close garden, where the flowers languished, and the birds now and then gave a feeble chirp, shut in by the stone walls, where very little air, if air there was stirring, could reach them. Elsie had done nothing all day but scold Jeanie, and the tones of her voice reached Agatha from the back premises, in one continued stream.

Mrs. Hope was teased with an error in her accounts, and sat for the greater part of the day bending over two books, her pen in her hand, and a slate at her side, where she sometimes put down a row of intractable figures. The faint murmur, through the open window, of "Two from six," or "fifteen and twenty," came to vex Agatha's already irritable state, in the intervals of the noises from the other side of the house.

Mr. Bruce was at Torminster; and after a *tête-à-tête* dinner with Mrs. Hope, at one o'clock, Agatha again betook herself to the garden, wishing she had energy to creep down the lane, where at least she could see the sea, and yet

feeling the effort not to be thought of. Then there would be no going out in the boat that evening, as Mr. Bruce was away at the Torminster market, and it was really too hot to read, or write, or draw, or do anything.

Agatha had just come to this point in her meditations, when the little wicket-gate was opened. Shag sprang forward, and stood on the defensive, while a man's voice called "Hal-loa!" to some one behind; "this is the front of the queer old house; we are right at last."

Agatha, who was sitting close under the windows, was not directly seen by the speaker, who advanced, with his companion, almost to her side before he discovered her.

"At last!" said another voice—this time a familiar one. "How do you do, Agatha?"

"Eustace!" she exclaimed, scarcely able to control her surprise, "where did you come from?"

"From Innsprück, in the first place, and from London in the second," he answered. "My friend, Captain Henley—Miss Moore. May we sit down, Agatha? we are half killed with the heat. What a frightfully relaxing place Havensmouth is!"

"Upon my word it is," said Captain Henley,

twisting his moustache. "Torminster is bad, but this is worse—a volcano's mouth, instead of an oven's—eh, Harrison." And then he sank back in one of the iron chairs which had lately made their appearance in the garden in honour of Agatha's frequenting it, and laughed a foolish laugh, without which Captain Henley seldom ended any speech.

He was one of a class of silly, empty-headed young men, who in these days are decidedly on the increase. These are they who will pour out a stream of weak aimless talk, by which, however, they manage to do an immense deal of mischief. These are the inventors of stories about other people, the bearers of tales from one house to another, which have a grain of truth for their foundation, and whole hundred-weights of falsehood for their superstructure! These are they to whom sensible women will sometimes listen complacently—even laugh at their silly jests, and call the authors of them agreeable and amusing. Of all gossips, these are the most dangerous; and as a great deal has been justly said and written about the evils brought about by feminine tittle-tattle—and they are, alas! manifold—it is only fair to admit that these men, often to be found amongst the

well-born, who easily obtain an entrance into all kinds of society—are mischievous in the extreme, and that a great deal of harm can often be traced to them as its source, in the circles where they find themselves welcomed and encouraged.

It does not concern us to describe Captain Heuley more minutely. The pale blue eyes, half open, smiling mouth, showing a set of very white teeth, and the incessant chatter which issues from it, are, most likely, familiar to us all. The lounging, careless manner, the moderately handsome face, and the perfection of dress, from the *négligé* of morning suits to the full glory of evening outfit, seems to belong to these men as a distinctive mark; and so it will, in all probability, remain.

Mrs. Hope, hearing the sound of voices, came to the window, her pen still in her hand, to see who the visitors could possibly be; and her astonishment was great when her eye fell upon two gentlemen, who were apparently perfectly at their ease with Agatha, and laughing and talking as if they had known her for years.

“I say, Miss Moore, I shall be more comfortable if you will kindly tell that extremely suspicious animal that I am here with no

felonious intent. He eyes me in the most singular way, as if I were a wolf come down upon the sheep he guards. I see he is a Scotch sheep-dog — a fine fellow, if he were more amiable.”

“Shag, come here,” Agatha said. “Shag, lie down;” and the dog obeyed.

He had been surveying the guests with a half contemptuous, half suspicious glance, sidelong with his brown eyes; but at Agatha’s word he composed himself at her feet, and showed no intention of giving up his care of her to these strangers.

“Tell me all about Uncle Robert, and Beatrice, and Victoria. I have only heard once since—since——”

“Oh, yes; you know all about that unlucky business. My father is broken down, quite broken down. If it were not for my mother, I do not know what would become of him. He is coming back to England, he is so wretched abroad. It would not surprise me if they wintered here in Havensmouth. Captain Henley is on a mission to-day, to look for a house for the Cavendishes from Northborough. They want to come in October. The poor boy, Walter, is weaker, and one of the girls has got a cough. So, some

of them are coming here under their aunt's patronage—that grim, gigantic Miss Battiscombe, you must remember. That is the true history of the case. Is it not, Henley?”

“Yes; but seriously, Harrison, I must call you to order about that grim, gigantic Miss Battiscombe. Don't you know she is *my* aunt as well as Susie Cavendish's, and that I owe her allegiance. I kindly forbid the banns the other day, when she was going to marry, in her fiftieth year, that——”

But here the speaker stopped, as, grave and dignified, Mrs. Hope came out into the garden; and in spite of her old-fashioned dress and stiff manner, the bow with which the two young men returned Agatha's explanatory introduction was respectful and courteous. Eustace Harrison was very glad of Mrs. Hope's arrival, for, after a few minutes, he left her to Captain Henley's rattle, and was able to talk to Agatha.

“I wanted to speak to you about that unfortunate loss of my father's. I do hope, some day, we shall be able to make it good to you. At present, every penny of ready money is wanted, and the word *ready* is rather misplaced. There are calls yet to be paid on those detestable shares; and here is my father, so mad as to go

to law against one of the companies, and trying to prove that the shareholders are not responsible, when they have been led into taking shares through false representations. I know enough of law to wish to keep every one belonging to me out of its clutches. In the hands of the lawyers is surely to be in the hands of the Philistines, the jaws of the lion, or any other simile you may like better. But we will not waste our time on such a disagreeable subject. Could not you stroll into that lane with me, the good lady and the gallant captain following? I want to ask you several questions: one, why you did not answer my letter last autumn; another, if you ever mean to reclaim that pretty little manuscript book with red edges?"

"I cannot walk without a stick, and not very well with that. I am lame now, and sometimes I think my foot will never be as strong as it was before the accident."

"What accident? Bee told me you had sprained your ankle, but I never heard it was anything more serious. You have not written to my sisters much of late, Agatha. Your silence has been misinterpreted by my mother, and I think it has vexed my poor father, who was

always fond of you. Now, give me a history of yourself for the last six or eight months. Tell me why you would not answer my letter, to begin with."

"I did not see that it needed an answer," she said. "As to my history, it is soon told."

"You are horridly dull and wretched now—that is the truth."

"Oh, no, no; they are so kind to me—Mr. Bruce especially. I could not complain when I have everything that is possible done for me. I have read a great deal, and sketched, and written, and I have been happy—yes, happy, in a quiet way. When my foot gets well, I am going to try to do something for my living, as a daily governess, or——"

"Nonsense! that must never be," he interrupted; "quite absurd to think of it."

"I do not see that there is anything absurd in it," said Agatha. "But tell me about all the places I once thought I should see for myself—that will be much better than talking about my concerns."

He made a gesture of dissent, but nevertheless he gave the details she asked for, and in a very few minutes the old spell seemed upon her. She was longing again for change and variety.

She was mistaking Eustace Harrison's power of appreciation for something deeper. She was thinking, as she had thought so many times during the memorable fortnight during which he had sought her companionship at Shadrington, that he was altogether superior to the rest of the world; and the feelings which she fancied she had scattered to the four winds of heaven with the fragments of his letter, from the crest of St. Mary's Hill, gathered together again, and seemed stronger than ever.

But Captain Henley was getting very tired of talking to Mrs. Hope. His jests did not seem to strike her as he expected. When he laughed at his own feeble wit, she looked gravely up from her knitting, and seemed quite unconscious that there was anything amusing in what he said.

"Come, old fellow," he exclaimed at last, "I am sorry to break in upon your interesting conversation; but if we are to get back to Torminster to-night, it is time we made our way to Havensmouth. If we live to get there in this ferocious heat, it will be a miracle."

"Can I offer you any refreshment," Mrs. Hope inquired—"cider, or a glass of home-made wine?"

"Thanks; upon my word, either will be very acceptable;" and when Mrs. Hope disappeared to fetch it, Captain Henley began to make sundry observations on her, which were neither very well bred, nor in very good taste.

"I say, she is an awfully strait-laced old lady," he began. "She pulled me up sharp when I brought in a 'verse from the Scriptures,' as she said, to illustrate a tale I invented for her amusement. And as I had no idea what book the words in question came from, it was all the more amusing. Upon my word I thought I was quoting Shakspeare, or some of those worthies. Does this excellent lady churn the butter here, and make Devonshire cream, Miss Moore?"

Agatha felt the utter want of good manners which Captain Henley showed, in thus turning into ridicule the mistress of the house where he was for an hour a guest; but she turned away her head with a little contemptuous movement, which was lost on Captain Henley, though not on Eustace.

"Come, come, Henley, you should not allow your brilliant satire to rest on a lady who is showing you hospitality." And as he spoke Mrs. Hope returned with a tray, on which were a bottle of effervescing cider and a plate of biscuits made by her own hands, and of a quality that

Huntley and Palmer could never rival. Both cider and biscuits quickly disappeared, and the two young men were about to take their leave, when Shag started forward with a bound to the wicket-gate, which opened this time to admit Mr. Bruce.

A silence followed, which Agatha felt she must break, as Mrs. Hope showed no sign of doing so. She uttered the words of introduction a second time, and Mr. Bruce acknowledged them very much in the way his sister had done. As he stood in the group, fully a head and shoulders taller than either Eustace Harrison or Captain Henley, he presented a marked contrast to them. His stout farmer's boots and leggings, and the whole style of his dress was so different from theirs. But the difference was not only here. His level brows, and quiet serene mouth, stern, perhaps, in its expression now beyond what Agatha had ever remembered to have seen it—the broad intellectual head, from which the hair had receded, made him look so much older than either of the other men.

Eustace Harrison prided himself on his imperturbable manners, and the self-control which never allowed him to be betrayed into the wonder or surprise of common minds.

But Roland Bruce had something beyond and above that, which could be felt rather than described.

During the five minutes that followed before Eustace and his friend finally departed, Captain Henley's conceited chatter decreased sensibly, and the patronizing superior air in which he had at first addressed Roland changed insensibly. He graciously accepted the offer of the dog-cart back to Havensmouth, in which Mr. Bruce had just driven from the station, and joined Eustace Harrison in thanks for the welcome help it would afford in the suffocating heat.

Eustace's parting with Agatha caught Mr. Bruce's ear.

"*Au revoir*," he said; "the Cavendishes will be here next winter, even if my own people are not, and I shall be looking them up. Till then I will keep the book; may I?"

"Yes," Agatha had answered, and there was a colour in her cheeks, and a soft lustre in her eyes which Mr. Bruce was quick to mark, though it had died away, and left her paler than usual when he came into the garden again after the dog-cart had clattered out of the yard. Struck with the change and her listless, weary manner, he said,

"Will you come down to the cove? there will be more air there. We can get into the boat and row out a little way."

"No," she answered; "I don't think I could come, it is so hot, and I am so tired."

Mrs. Hope, who had now returned, said, "I don't wonder that you are tired. What can be more wearisome than the conversation of people like those who have just left us. If they are specimens of what society affords now-a-days, one may be thankful to be out of it."

"Indeed!" said Agatha, sharply, "I have found it very amusing. I enjoyed seeing my cousin again; it was quite a pleasant break in my life," and her voice faltered.

"Gracie," said Mr. Bruce, "can you give us a little tea and dismiss us to the cove? The air in this garden, enclosed by walls, is very oppressive, and I shall be glad to refresh myself in John Page's boat. Won't you come too?"

"Oh, no. I have a troublesome hitch in my accounts, which I had nearly got straight when Agatha's friends came. I must go back to that. You can have some tea. I dare say Elspeth has some ready in the kitchen. I never drink it at improper times; it is most unwholesome, and keeps Agatha weak and languid, I am

sure. As to you, Roland, you had far better have a glass of wine and water after all your tiring day at the market."

But Mr. Bruce had already gone down the passage to look after the tea; and when Elsie had brought it in her own particular grey-stone teapot, with a plate of Scotch scones, and Agatha had partaken of them, she felt so much refreshed that she changed her mind, and said she was ready to go to the cove now.

They walked there in silence.

Johnnie Page was nowhere to be seen, but Mr. Bruce unmoored the boat, and helping Agatha carefully into it, he pulled out from the shore for ten minutes, and then resting on his oars, said,

"It is much cooler here."

"Oh, yes!" she answered, "it is such a relief; but I think we shall have a thunder-storm to-night."

"Yes, I have no doubt of it."

And again there was silence. Everything looked dark and sullen in the thick heavy air; not a ripple moved the surface of the water; not a sound was to be heard from land or sea. A family of sea-birds sat in silent conclave on one of the ledges of rock which shelved out from

St. Mary's Island, and in the horizon three or four apparently motionless ships stood up like grey phantoms.

It was the silence before the storm—the deep silence in which all nature sits brooding, and expectant of the coming strife. It seemed to Mr. Bruce that he should never care to break it by a word as he sat watching Agatha leaning on the side of the boat, her eyes fixed upon the water, in which her fingers played, and a smile hovering round her mouth. She had taken off her hat, and the outline of her small head was distinctly brought out by the dark background of St. Mary's Island, off which the boat was riding. Suddenly she raised her head, and asked,

“My manuscript has never been heard of, has it?”

“Yes, I heard of it to-day.”

“Not good news, or you would have told me directly,” she said, looking at him. “Not *good* news?” she asked, with a gleam of expectation in her eyes.

“Not good news, from one point of view,” he said, “the manuscript is returned.”

“Of course,” she said, her look of mingled hope and anxiety changed to one of disappoint-

ment. "What did the man say—the publisher, I mean?"

"It is a very civil and courteous note. You may read it if you like," and he handed it to her.

Agatha took it, and glanced over the few lines several times.

"Will you try any one else?"

"If you wish it, certainly I will. But this is my second venture with the manuscript."

"You never told me."

"No, I did not think it worth while, for the first publisher I tried was—it struck me afterwards, although he knows me well, and we have had several transactions about agricultural papers—unlikely to take a romantic story from a young lady's pen. But I am more inclined to rest on the judgment of the writer of that letter. You see, he does not discourage further effort, or even the pruning and condensing of the manuscript in question."

"I thought you said you liked the poor story so much. I thought you said that you sat up the night I hurt my foot to finish reading it."

"So I did, and honestly and sincerely I do like the story, for its own sake. There are many fresh and even beautiful thoughts in it. There is

originality and depth too. I like it, Agatha, but I do not represent the public; and I have no doubt Mr. Halstead is right and I am wrong."

"I don't see why he should be," said Agatha; "he is not infallible. But though you may take it so coolly, it is a very different thing to me. I did—I do so very much want to do something by which I may be independent. Of course," she went on, the colour rising to her face, "I am not so stupid that I cannot see I am a great expense to you and Mrs. Hope. The doctor's bill will be a very large one, I dare say. Margaret Bromfield told me the other day that Mr. Hall always charged a great deal for his attendance. And then there is all the wine and strengthening things I had when I was so weak, for the first month. Oh," she went on, with one of the impetuous bursts of confidence which, she never knew why, she could not help now and then bestowing on Mr. Bruce, "Oh, it is so hard, that I should have just the very thing to bear which I *cannot* bear patiently. I am poor, and have no father, or mother, or brothers and sisters, and I am obliged to be dependent on people on whom I have no claim. Why, you are no relation to me whatever, and Mrs. Hope and Aunt Anna are only cousins—second cousins.

And yet, when I wish to help myself, no one will encourage me, or set me in the right way. You laughed at my advertisement when I wished to be a governess, and now that I have lamed myself, and cannot be that just yet, you don't seem to care in the least that my only other hope has failed. Margaret Bromfield, too, says a great many girls would not distress themselves about what cannot be helped, and she calls me proud and over-sensitive, and thinks me ridiculous. But I am quite determined," she said with emphasis, "that I cannot sit idly here, where in the first instance I was sent against your will, as I have so often said, and owe everything to you. You are very kind to me," she added, earnestly, "very kind. I am so grateful to you. But, Mrs. Hope, I feel certain does not *quite* like having me with her. I see I annoy her; and sometimes I am stirred, just for opposition sake, to say things she does not like, and leave scraps about in her rooms, and fill my own with all sorts of odds and ends. Then old Elspeth—though I am fond of her, and I don't think she really hates me—is always 'hinting at me,' as she would express it, about the changes I have brought on in two peaceful lives, and how I am given up to frippery and folly, 'sticking bits of trumpery flowers in

my hair,' as she remarked last evening, when I made a wreath of those little white roses Margaret Bromfield brought for me. I dare say all this sounds trifling and silly to you, but I cannot help it. Perhaps it is wrong to be proud; but, after all, I think I would rather feel as I do, than be content to sit with folded hands, and live upon your kindness. I would go into the dairy and churn instead of Elsie, or milk the cows instead of Jeanie, or keep the large butter and cream accounts for Mrs. Hope, with the greatest pleasure. But no one would be the better for that, or thank me for doing badly what others do well. I think," she said, after a pause, and still he did not speak, "you might help me, you might advise me, you might be sorry for me."

"I *am* sorry for you," he said at last, with a great effort, and if the scarcely acknowledged and hardly defined feeling, that in Eustace Harrison existed all that could make her happy, had not taken such complete possession of her again, something of the truth would have dawned on her at that moment. For the grey eyes which looked into hers from beneath their dark lashes were tender and full of sympathy, and the tones of the voice were tremulous with repressed emotion.

For days and weeks past he had been making up his mind as to the right course. He had gone with this great love of his, as with everything else, to the unfailing Source of wisdom, for help and comfort.

"If it be Thy will," was the bound he had learned long ago to set to all his hopes and desires, "If it be Thy will," and here, and no further, must his own will come.

Early disappointment in his brightest hopes had driven him shipwrecked and forlorn into the Haven of peace. And when he came out again with sails set, and helm bravely pointed to breast whatever waves or storms might be appointed him, he was in earnest, thoroughly in earnest, to shape his course according to the direction of the Great Pilot. And henceforth everything must yield, must be *made* to yield to the Guide to whom he had surrendered heart and soul.

"Yes, everything, even this; if it is for her good and mine," he had said to himself, "she will be given to me. She will love me, and I shall make her happy as no one else ever could. But if this hope is also to fail, if it can never be fulfilled, I have yet the anchor to hold by, that my times are in His hands, who knows me better than I know myself."

But he would wait patiently, till the right moment came, he said, and then he would speak. He thought the right moment had come now. And after another pause, during which he had struck a few strokes with the oars, and lessened the distance between the boat and St. Mary's Island, he leaned upon them once more, and when she said—

“I suppose we ought to go home soon.”

He answered, “I have something to say to you first, Agatha. Will you listen?”

The tone of his voice was so grave that she looked at him almost frightened. She felt as if she were a child on the eve of a lecture.

Purposely he put this great restraint upon himself, and only experienced eyes—and Agatha's were wholly inexperienced—could have seen through the outward manner, so calm and grave, to the heart which was beating with anxiety, and awaiting her answer with great throbs which were almost pain.

“Agatha,” the words were few and simple, “you say you are homeless, and alone in the world. It need not be so any more. It rests with you to decide whether you will make your home with me, be my wife. And if it please

God to grant me your love, I can tell you that mine for you is such that I dare not trust myself to speak of it. It is such love, Agatha, as a true-hearted man can offer to the woman who is set high above all others for him, and whom he longs to take to his heart, and guard and cherish while life lasts."

With parted lips and wide-open wondering eyes, Agatha heard these words. Her face expressed nothing but the surprise she felt. By the light of this new revelation was she to read the past? Was she now to discover that what she had thought the result of friendly interest and care for her, had had a deeper spring. Was it really so? Or was this only a proposition made to her in answer to all her complainings and longings—another act of kindness done to save her from all future trouble about being dependent, and with no settled home?

These thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, and he waited patiently for her to speak. At last he said—

"Perhaps I have said this too suddenly, Agatha. Forgive me if I have. I am not learned in the ways of the world. Is it time that you want to think over what I have said?"

"No, it is not that," she spoke at last. "I

have talked to you about what I have wished to do so often, and about everything, as if you had been—my elder brother. I am sorry now, very sorry, that I have done so. You have been so kind to me—I never once thought this would come of it; and now I see that you are saying this from the same reason that has made you get me books to read, and do everything you could to please me.”

“Yes,” he answered, “the reason is the same, Agatha. You are quite right.”

“I know it,” she went on. “But what you propose cannot be. You think too well of me. I am not half as good as you are. I could not always live a life at St. Mary’s Farm without longing for other things. I told you once how I wished to be good—quite good, and find my greatest pleasure in religion, as you do, and Mrs. Hope does, and some other people do. But I have never got beyond wishing. I am very worldly at my heart. I may, and do, *wish* to be good, and to love God; but I have never got beyond the desire. And, even if this *could* be, you would be disappointed in me, I know.”

She spoke with all her accustomed frankness, just as she had spoken to him before about her

writing, and all her little schemes and hopes for the future.

"All this," he replied, quickly, "does not answer my question. Will you answer it now, or think over it, as I propose?"

"I could not come to any other conclusion," she said, "if I thought for the next three months. You have been so kind to me—and now it will be different." And her lip trembled, and tears gathered in her eyes. "Now it will be different. You will think me ungracious and ungrateful, and yet I cannot help it."

"You are making a great mistake about me, Agatha. It is I who have everything at stake—I who have to ask you to give me yourself as the very best gift that could be bestowed on me. If you cannot do this—if, indeed, you turn away from me, as your words imply—it will be a heavy cross laid on me—far heavier than you or any earthly friend can dream of, or any earthly friend help me to bear."

Agatha looked at him as he said these words, and she could not doubt their truth any longer. But the waywardness of her age, and the pride of her natural disposition, impelled her to maintain the ground she had taken up.

"Agatha," he said, "tell me, is there no

hope for me? Will you not let me be to you all that I wish and crave to be?"

"No," she answered. "No. You are very kind to me, and I know how unselfish and generous you are. But it can never be as you say. It *can never be.*"

He made a gesture as of sudden pain, and then he took up the oars, and rowed with his boldest, quickest stroke to the shore. Johnnie Page was waiting there with Shag to receive the boat. He had been watching it with much curiosity, as it lay still and motionless in the water. He had wondered what Mr. Bruce could be thinking of, with the storm gathering up in the south, and the lightning already beginning to flash across the dark masses of cloud in the horizon.

"And then suddenly to come to land at a rate like that!" exclaimed Johnnie. "What an oar the master pulls, to be sure! I never saw the like," as the boat shot into the little cove, and its keel grated on the shingle.

Not one word did Mr. Bruce say to Johnnie. He lifted Agatha from the boat, and guided her through the masses of rock to the steep path, up which he helped her, as he had done so many times of late. When they reached the lane it

was nearly dark between the high hedges. At the wicket-gate he paused, and said in a low voice, which thrilled through Agatha—

“What has passed this evening between you and me need never be known to any one. I will do my best to hide whatever I may feel—even from you. You need not be afraid of my referring to this subject again while you remain with us. Do not let it make you uneasy; try to forget what I have said. But if ever the time should come when you need me, as a friend, or, as you say, ‘an elder brother,’ promise to come to me—promise to count upon my service in any way to the last hour of my life. And may God bless you, Agatha, and preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, even for evermore.”

There was a depth of feeling and tenderness in the tone of his voice, which had always a stronger Scotch accent when he was deeply moved, which touched Agatha as no florid protestations could have done. She broke away from him, and left him standing just within the gateway, while she went slowly into the house. Shag, who had been present as these last words were spoken, followed her for a few paces, then paused, and, looking back, saw his master in the

dim light hiding his face on his folded arms, as he leaned against the stone support of the wicket-gate. Shag saw that trouble hovered near, and he would not desert him. He crouched by his side, and Shag only was witness to the conflict which bowed that brave spirit to the very dust, as he stood under the old archway, on which were written words of sacred promise for him, and for such as him, who have, as he said, "an anchor to hold by, let the storm rage never so fiercely."

And as Agatha lay awake that night listening to the peals of thunder which at last broke over the farm and shook it to its foundation; as she cowered and hid her face from the gleams of lightning which showed everything in the room distinctly for a few minutes, and then left it in total darkness, she felt as if she were more alone and desolate than ever. She had misgivings, and a sort of vague regret. She had turned away from the help and comfort offered to her; she had refused the love of a faithful and true heart; and she had perhaps shut herself out from the friendship she so needed, and which had been so woven in with her life for the last eight or nine months. Still, the language of her heart was the same. There was a craving for a dif-

ferent lot to the one that might have been hers. The society of clever, intellectual people, and all the countless accessories of life, apart from the daily routine of simple-hearted women like Mrs. Hope—on and on the same ; no change, no variety. No ! it could not be. As to Roland Bruce himself, he was wholly good, and true, and clever ; the best friend she had ever known—should ever know, perhaps. But nevertheless (though the mere thought made her cheek crimson), Eustace Harrison was more in everything like her ideal—that shadowy ideal over which undisciplined girl-natures will dream and brood, and to which they raise the first person who pleases their fancy, and with whom they imagine they have sympathies and interests in common.

Poor little Agatha ! She was to learn the great and wide gulf set between the fine gold, tried in the furnace, over which the refiner had sat, and the mere gilded exterior of a nature where self was the great object, to which everything else must directly or indirectly yield. It is with a feeling akin to sad regret that we see her blind to her best interests, and turning her face away from the nest, like a young bird feeling itself strong on the wing, to try her flight alone, till her foot should rest in a far off and

pleasant land, where it would be always summer, and sunshine, and joy. She had been honest, however, and truthful in what she had said to Mr. Bruce; and in that she was far above many of her age and romantic, impulsive temper. She had told him the truth—what she believed to be the plainest truth, and there was comfort in that.

Her Father's eye was upon her, though she knew it not. The Shepherd would not let the lamb wander beyond the reach of his voice. One day would she not hear the call, and answer, though perhaps He may come with the rod in his hand, under which she shall pass, and be brought into the bond of the Covenant.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORM AND THE WRECK.

“Oh! purblind race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true;
Here, thro' the feeble twilight of this world
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
That other, where we see as we are seen.”

TENNYSON.

AGATHA slept late the next morning, and when she went down to breakfast the sitting-room was empty. This was not an uncommon thing, however; and since the accident to her foot, Mrs. Hope had been more lenient about Agatha's non-appearance at the early prayers, which preceded breakfast.

When Mrs. Hope came into the room at last, her face was troubled and anxious. “Roland has gone away for a week,” she said; “he told me last night he did not feel very well, and he thought a change would be useful to him; so he had

made up his mind to start at once. It is unlike him, however, and I am afraid he must feel more really ill than he tells me. Have you heard him complain, Agatha? You have had more of his company of late than I have."

There was a touch of vexation in Mrs. Hope's tone which did not escape Agatha's ear; but she was saved the necessity of a reply, by Shag's sudden entrance through the open window, which brought upon him a sharp reproof from Mrs. Hope. Shag had just returned from the station with the dog-cart, and having seen the last of his master, returned in haste to guard what he had left behind.

Philip was meantime holding a conversation with Elspeth in the kitchen, where a second edition of breakfast, in the form of bread and cheese and cider, awaited him, before he rubbed down the mare, and betook himself to his farm duties.

"There's something up," he said, "with the master. Only yesterday he was full of turning up the double cross field, where the grain is just carried from, and sowing it for pasture for some short-horns. He was a-going on to me about the manure as never was, all hot to begin; and now there he is off, with never a word more than to

let it bide till he comes home this day week, and I was to go on as usual, and tell Johnnie Page to let the other lads know there would be no school on Sunday, and to be sure to let the pint of new milk go to the sick woman by Dunster Cove regular; and that old Bunting, the grumbling old rascal! was to have a joint of mutton off that there Dartmoor beast that was killed yesterday. He don't deserve it, thought I to myself, but I did not speak my mind; it ain't of no good."

"No, it ain't of no good, that's true enough," was Elsie's reply; "or I'd speak mine, and say who's been and done all the mischief; but I ain't one to speak my mind when I shall only make a wound I can't heal."

"Ain't you, though," ejaculated Philip, with a knowing wink at Jeanie, who was lifting a pot off the fire; "well, I thought if anybody spoke out their mind 'twas you, Elspeth, wound or not wound."

"Then that shows what a numskull you are, Philip," was the rejoinder; "I won't mince matters now, whether it wound ye or no. So if you'll take my advice, you will be for looking after the mare, that has stood there with the cloth over her long enough. Ay, ay," Elsie murmured to herself, as Philip stumped off, "I see it all as if it

were written in a book ; but why should I go and tell the dear mistress and make her miserable, and stir her up to feel to that wee bit of a lassie hard and bitter as I am like to do myself. She has few friends, poor wee lassie—few friends ; and if the rest are of the same ilk as the two who were chattering here like jackdaws yesterday, and puffing their smoke as they drove off, they ain't like to do her much good. So I'll not be the one to turn the mistress's love to her, what love there is, into gall and bitterness. There's a glamour the lassie casts upon one, too, like the charm folks talk of, which lures the birds to the snare. And to think of his being caught again as he was long years ago. Well, well, there's One above who rules his lot, and I know he is safe ; the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord ; why should an old cross-grained body like me fume and fret."

The week of Mr. Bruce's absence dragged heavily on ; the weather had quite broken up, and after the long summer, autumn seemed to set in with premature decay. A day at Linden Villa was hailed by Agatha as an immense relief, to the dull monotony of long hours, while the rain pattered against the windows, as she sat with Mrs. Hope, who had a busy pre-

occupied manner, and except for expressing wonder as to how Roland was getting on, and fears that he would get cold in such wet weather, was more than usually silent. So when, one morning, Margaret Bromfield, with her accustomed practical forethought, sent down a covered pony-chair, known at Havensmouth as a "midge," with a little pencil note, "Come and spend the day with me," Agatha went upstairs more quickly than she had done for many a day, and dressed herself in all haste to obey the summons. As the midge slowly laboured up St. Mary's Lane, and the rain pelted on the roof, Agatha remembered that, in her haste, she had not told Mrs. Hope where she was going, and she was sorry she had not done so, as she knew the omission would displease her, and she did not wish to widen the gulf which somehow she felt was growing imperceptibly wider between herself and her cousin.

The day passed pleasantly and quickly. Margaret had much to tell, and gave her one very interesting piece of information—that the Firs, a house on Dewsbury Hill, had been taken for the winter by some people named Cavendish. Mr. Cavendish was a canon of Northborough Cathedral; did Agatha know anything of him?

The house was let by the man who was seat-keeper and general overlooker of St. Mary's Church, and his wife acted as cook and housekeeper at the Firs. Two gentlemen had looked at the house a week ago, and a letter engaging it from the middle of September till May had arrived a day or two after.

"From what Coxe said," Margaret continued, "I should think it was a relation of the Cavendishes—Captain something or other. Coxe did mention the name, but I forget it."

"Captain Henley," Agatha said; "he was here with my cousin Eustace Harrison that very hot day, a week ago. He said he was come to look for a house for his cousins, and Eustace says he thinks it is not unlikely that his father and mother will winter here too."

"Oh, then, you will go and live with them again," exclaimed Margaret; "I am very glad, for it is really a pity you should not see something of the bright side of Havensmouth. If people have good introductions, it is wonderful how many parties they are asked to. Why, if I were so inclined, I should be out every night in the winter; sometimes to two parties in one evening. There is a certain set of people who spend their winters here regularly, and if

you get into that, it is impossible to fancy any society pleasanter."

"Why, Margaret," Agatha said, "you forget that I have not a penny in the world, and even if I were asked to go to all these places, I could not buy the dress which would be necessary. If the Harrisons do come here, it will be because they are so straitened now, and Uncle Robert's money losses have made him so ill and miserable, that he is not likely to go out at all. Then, though I certainly shall not stay at the farm, I could not go to them to be a burden greater than when I left them. They will not ask me to do so, to begin with; at least Aunt Anna—or Mrs. Harrison, as I want to get into the way of calling her—will never wish for me."

"And this cousin Eustace, is he to lose his relationship now his mother is deposed from being aunt?" asked Margaret, with a smile that made Agatha's cheek crimson.

"Eustace is my cousin—my second cousin, of course," she answered impatiently, "but Mrs. Harrison was never my aunt."

"Well, don't ruffle your feathers about it, Agatha, there's a good child. I have sometimes thought this cousin at St. Mary's Farm might have particular motives in his head concerning

you. I have the greatest admiration for him, I must say, though I think he has made a great mistake in shutting himself up in that quiet, lonely place; but there is certainly something very much out of the common in him, and his appearance is so much in his favour. In the roughest farmer's coat, who could doubt he was of gentle birth."

Margaret watched the effect of her speech very narrowly, but there was no sudden change in Agatha's face this time.

"Yes, he is very good," she said indifferently, "and he has been extremely kind to me. But, Margaret, you are all wrong about my relations. Mr. Bruce is not related to me at all. Mrs. Hope was my mother's cousin on her own mother's side."

"Oh, is that it?"

And then Margaret was carried on into other subjects, and the conversation drifted far away from Agatha and her concerns. With all her hearty liking for Margaret, and the gratitude she felt towards her for many little acts of kindness, Agatha always found something in her which jarred on her more or less; and yet there were tender points in her nature which now and then showed themselves, and would awaken Agatha's sym-

pathy and make her ready to love her. It is so with these self-contained natures, who provoke us sometimes by their success and their satisfaction in their own achievements. The clinging, trusting women, who hunger for words of encouragement in their efforts, and thirst for the meed of praise from those they love when the desired end is attained, feel a sense of provocation when they see others, like Margaret Blomfield, so secure of themselves, smiling serenely as they accept acknowledgment of their service as their due, and never questioning their own powers or their own usefulness for a moment. Still, as I have said, there are times when a hidden spring is touched, and it is a comfort to find that those who have seemed so far removed from our imperfections and shortcomings, have their weak points after all. Such was that sudden confidence Margaret made to Agatha when she came to visit her when she was ill; such were the few words she spoke about her mother, just before Agatha's "midge" came, and she was waiting in the back drawing-room for its announcement.

"Does mamma not strike you as looking worse?" she suddenly asked of Agatha. "I am sure she must," as Agatha hesitated, "and oh! what it is to me, to have to carry out Dr.

Hastings' orders, and tell her she is better this autumn than she was last; even please her by speaking of a journey to Nice or Cannes, when I see, Agatha, she gets daily weaker. Papa carries her down every day now, and that little improvement in the summer was only the flickering of the candle at the last. I am certain of it; and yet papa will not have his eyes opened, and contested the point with me about sending Herbert as a weekly boarder to Mr. Saxby's, saying he amused mamma, when the very sound of the child's voice has been too much for her of late. It is so strange that papa, who sees so many consumptive people here, and tells me sometimes that such an one is come to Havensmouth only to die, should be so wilfully blind about mamma. It is his love for her, I think, that causes it; but then, especially as he is a clergyman, surely he ought to be preparing her for what is coming—for *it is coming*, Agatha, I know. There was always the seed of the disease in mamma, I dare say; but I think papa will never forget how, soon after Mary's death, he urged her to go out one cold, stormy day, and she got very wet, and the cold was caught which began this very long illness. It makes him more unwilling to see how it really is now. It was very like me to do as he did,

insisting that the air and the walk would do her good, and pressing it on her from the best motives, thinking all the time he must be right. He has mentioned it once or twice to me, and with such self-reproach as is terrible to see. I dread how it will be soon, when she is really gone, and I shall be alone with him, and the boys all at school. Poor father ! ”

Agatha put her hand in Margaret's as they stood by the fire, and kissed her in mute token of sympathy. After a very few minutes, Margaret was herself again, and Agatha had rather she had not said, so that Watson might hear if he chose, “ There is nothing to pay for the midge, remember, and if the man asks for anything don't give it to him ; Watson will have settled it, and he will only try to get another shilling out of you. Good-bye.”

When Agatha reached the door of the sitting-room on her return home, she heard voices, and entering she saw Mr. Bruce in his accustomed place and Mrs. Hope in hers opposite to him. He was determined that he would spare no pains to set Agatha at her ease whatever it might cost him, so he rose and greeted her in his wonted manner ; said he was glad to see how independent she had become again, and hoped she would not

try her foot too soon or too much. He drew the big carpet-covered footstool by the fire, which was welcome this damp, chilly evening, and told her to take up her usual position on the stool of humility. All Agatha's flutter and agitation, as she remembered how they had last parted, calmed down under his influence, and she did just as he told her without a word, laying her hat and waterproof cloak on a chair and seating herself as she was bid. When, at last, she ventured to look up into Mr. Bruce's face, she saw there very much of his usual expression, though he looked paler, and she even fancied older, than he had done a week ago.

"I wondered what had become of you," Mrs. Hope spoke at last, and her voice was cold and her manner formal as she continued, "it is not usual, I believe, for one member of a family to absent herself without giving any hint of her intentions to the others. I heard from the girl Jeanie you had gone away in a midge, but where, I had not the slightest idea. When my brother inquired for you on his return, an hour ago, I could only say you were gone."

"And as your acquaintance in Havensmouth is not extensive, I easily guessed where you had flown," Mr. Bruce interposed, while Agatha said—

“I beg your pardon for going without telling you, but I did not know where to find you just then ; and I was so very glad to get away, the only thing I thought about was how quickly I could get into the midge, and answer Margaret Bromfield’s invitation by going at once.”

Mrs. Hope said no more, and the rest of the evening seemed very long and dreary.

“It cannot go on like this,” was the cry of the little impatient, restless heart ; “it would be dreadful to stay here all the winter.” And she carried on a like train of thought till supper was brought in and the evening prayers followed.

Now, as on the first night when she had heard Mr. Bruce’s voice, the words which he read arrested her. Every hidden beauty of the fourteenth chapter of St. John’s Gospel, which Mrs. Hope pointed out to her brother as the one next to that she had read on the preceding night, seemed to be brought out forcibly by the reader ; and as he went on, Agatha fixed her eyes on him, and that desire, which she had told him never got beyond desire, seemed to arise now with a yearning that was almost pain. “Let not your heart be troubled,” “I will not leave you comfortless,” said the Lord ; and so on, till the last verse fell with a strange power, and the face

of the reader brightened as the words left his lips.

“In the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world.” Yes, tribulation which shall be till the wheat is separated from the chaff that would fain cling to it. Yes, tribulation till the image of the dear Lord shines in the silver which He has purified. Then the cheer for the fainting but pursuing one, then the joy which the world knows not of, the pledge of victory given by Him who is the victor, and lies fast and sure in his own declaration, “I have overcome the world.”

Why are so many of us like poor little Agatha, never getting beyond the *wish*, as she said, to be good, and to find her highest pleasures in the very things which, as yet, were often but a weariness ? Does not the answer to this lie here : that though we are willing enough to have His comfort, we will not bear His cross ; that we keep a large room in our hearts for the world in all its varied and deceitful forms, and we would fain give Him the rest ; that we crave for worldly distinction, or pleasure, or profit ; and then when we are disappointed, or lonely, or sad, wish that we could realize the blessedness of that comfort which seems so far from us ; and

wish, and still never get beyond wishing, that we could grasp it. And when we see the beauty of a real active faith shining out in the daily lives of some true-hearted and faithful ones, we admire and respect them, and wish we were like them, and sigh because it cannot be—it cannot be! No, because we love self, and self-pleasing, and the world, better than we love our dear Lord, who has said, “Give me thy heart.”

So great an effort did Mr. Bruce make to be to Agatha as he had ever been, to set her at ease in his presence, and to relieve her from any uncomfortable feeling, that, in the course of a few days, she really seemed to be living the old life again; and she began to look on those words he had spoken as a dream, or to assure herself that they had been said only in kindness to her to solve all her difficulties, and to give her the choice at least of a home where no sense of dependence might worry her proud, sensitive nature. Sometimes, indeed, there was a momentary depth of tenderness and love in the expression of his eyes, which could not be altogether misunderstood; and had not Agatha's mind been very much engrossed at the time with the expected arrival of the Cavendishes at the Firs, and letters from her cousins about the

probability of their spending the winter at Havensmouth, she might not have been so insensible to the presence of an ever-thoughtful care and consideration for her as she was or fancied herself to be.

All doubts as to the possibility of Susan Cavendish finding her out at St. Mary's Farm, and continuing the fragmentary overtures of friendship she used to make to Agatha after the dinner parties at Shadrington Court, were set at rest one bright October morning, when, as Agatha was opening the little wicket-gate to go down the lane to Jessie Page's cottage, Susan herself stood before her, bright, and good-tempered, and genial as ever, in her pretty grey dress, looped up over a violet skirt, displaying the well-shod feet, which had suffered considerably from the mud in coming down St. Mary's Lane.

"I am glad I have found you at last," she said. "I made an unsuccessful expedition yesterday, and Aunt Cecilia was greatly scandalized at our lengthened absence—Clara's and mine. This is my sister Clara; you have never seen her, I think? She was not promoted to the dignity of dining out in the days when we used to drive to Shadrington, and I was wont to frequent the

little table where you and Miss Francis sat demure and quiet as two mice. You are very much changed since then, scarcely more than a year."

"I dare say," was Agatha's reply. "I hurt my foot in the summer, and I am rather lame still; and I have led such a quiet life here, I have not been into any house but this for nearly a year, with one exception."

"Well, I should say, judging by the results, retirement and sprained ankles have a decidedly beneficial effect on the appearance. Now, I want you to come to spend the day with us. We are under Aunt Cecilia's supervision here. Papa is in residence just now at Northborough, and the doctors recommended mild sea-air at once for poor Walter and little Laura, one of my eight sisters, who has had a cough lately and grown too fast. Mamma will come and see us sometimes, and, as elder sisters, Clara and I shall change, perhaps, with some of the others; but Walter insisted on my setting him off here, he is so afraid of Aunt Cecilia. Fortunately, I am not, and Clara only a little; and as to Laura, she has her lessons to learn, and must do as she is bid, poor child! Aunt Cecilia may exercise her despotic rule over her. You are not to mind

Aunt Cecilia's snubs either; just take it easily, and she will desist. Nothing flatters her more than to see peoples' feelings are hurt by her sharp words; but she is really a good creature—isn't she, Clara? Now, will you come?"

Agatha had not walked as far as to the Firs for a long time, and hesitated. "I shall not be able to walk fast, I am afraid, and I think I must get a stick to help me. Won't you come in and sit down, while I tell Mrs. Hope where I am going?"

As she spoke, Shag dashed through the gate, and Mr. Bruce followed. Again Agatha had to introduce her friends to him, and this time the impression seemed a mutually pleasant one. Susan had a frank, bright, winning manner, entirely free from the touch of patronage by which Margaret Bromfield had offended Agatha at their first meeting. Susan was too much of a gentlewoman to concern herself about Agatha's present abode, or the "farm people," as the Harrisons had expressed it, with whom she lived. If she had taken a fancy to Agatha at Shadrington, and tried to draw her out from her shy retirement by the governess's side, she was not the one to shirk her now that she no

longer lived in a grand house, or was in what is popularly called "society."

"Susan, my dear," had been Miss Battiscombe's adjuration that morning, "I really hope you will be careful not to mix up yourself and your sisters with vulgar, second-rate people for the sake of this little *protégée* of yours. Her relations may be pushing and forward, and prove very troublesome all the winter. You have such extraordinary ideas on these matters."

"Have I, auntie?" and now Susan smiled as she remembered how her aunt had launched forth on the peculiar dangers Clara was exposed to, with a fortune and beauty as well, from both of which temptations Susan herself was exempt; for Clara had lately become the heiress of the riches of an aunt of her father's, who was a childless widow and her godmother, and had left Clara, on her coming of age, a very goodly fortune.

"The very last man to be pushing or forward, or a fortune-seeker," Susan thought, as she talked to Mr. Bruce while Agatha went into the house to prepare for her visit; "and I doubt, too, if Clara's beauty is sufficient to make an impression on him. Aunt Cecilia was never further from the truth in her life. I wish the lady would show herself, for a lady she is if she belongs to him."

But Mrs. Hope was in the dairy, and was not at all disposed to come and see any more of Agatha's friends. She received the notice of her visit to the Firs very coolly, and remarked that her foot must have greatly recovered its power.

"Will it not be too far for you to walk?" Mr. Bruce asked as Agatha rejoined him and the Cavendishes, who were exploring the chapel and admiring the quaint, many gabled back of the farm. "You must drive home. I am going into Havensmouth this afternoon, and will order a chair to come for you if you will tell me when?"

"Oh, not till the evening, please," said Susan; "we want to have as much of her as we can. Miss Moore and I are old friends. I hope you will often let her come to us."

He did not answer. What right had he to control Agatha's coming and going? And when he had opened the gate of the quadrangle, and bowed his good-bye to the three girls, he turned back towards the house with a heavy sigh.

When Agatha reached the Firs she was very tired, and glad of the prospect of rest in the pretty drawing-room, where Susan preceded her, saying, "This is Miss Moore, Aunt Cecilia."

A very slight inclination of the head was all that the tall lady, standing by the sofa where Walter Cavendish lay, vouchsafed in reply. Miss Battiscombe was on a very large scale—what, perhaps, some might call a fine woman, if by fineness is understood size. She had exaggerated ideas of her own importance and rank; the two words attached to her name were never forgotten—she was the Honourable Cecilia Battiscombe; and though, in default of male representation, her father's title had gone far away to a distant relation, she never allowed any one to lose sight of the fact that she was a peer's daughter; and indeed it seemed a pity she had not been a peer's son, that she might have ruled with all potent sway as Lord Fernycroft, instead of stalking about the world as Miss Battiscombe. She swept out of the room now with giant strides, taking no more heed of Agatha than of the chairs and tables which she passed on her way; but she paused at the door to say—

“Susan, I have had a note from Lady Turberville, begging you and Clara to go there with me this afternoon for five o'clock tea. She is at Mount Hermon. Don't forget it; these villas are so puzzling with their ridiculous names. The

Havensmouth people are gone mad about them, I think."

"You can tell Clara about Lady Turberville's note, auntie. I shall be engaged, and cannot go."

"Engaged! What are you going to do?"

"I should have thought you did not want to be told, Aunt Cecilia, as I have brought a friend home with me to spend the whole day. Now do rest yourself," she said, placing Agatha in an easy chair, and giving her a stool for her feet. "Walter, this is Agatha Moore. I used to lay plans to get her to croquet at Northborough, but the cousins always came without her. Do you remember?"

"Yes, very well," said Walter. "I am glad there are no cousins in the way now. Aunt Cecilia is in a very contrary mood this morning, Susie; I am so glad you are come back."

"Dear old fellow, is this a bad day?" said Susan, stooping over her brother, and kissing him. "I shall not leave you any more; and you, and I, and Agatha will have a nice jolly time when the rest are gone to Lady Turberville's to drink tea or dew on the little hill of Hermon."

"Hush, Susie, don't play with Bible words," said the boy. "I like all jokes but those, and I want to cure myself of ever making them."

"You are a good boy," was her answer. "Now, I am going to take Agatha's hat and jacket upstairs for her, and I will leave you together to make friends."

And when Susan was gone, Agatha looked with pitying interest on the boy, almost a man in years, stretched before her on the sofa. Walter's face was childish pretty and delicate, with masses of tangled brown hair thrown back from his transparent forehead. His eyes were large and bright, and about the small mouth were lines which told of pain and weariness, and of the daily cross of suffering. Walter's figure was shrunk and small, and he had no power in his legs; and all the skill of all the doctors, to whom the only son of a house so rich in daughters had been taken by his father and mother, was vain to suggest any remedy, or even alleviation. Agatha thought of little Jessie Page, in the cottage in the lane, whose case seemed so similar, and yet so different. The cottage-girl with nothing about her to soften the trial, to common observers; the other, with everything that could be devised to divert him from his sad privations. And yet from those few earnestly spoken words of Walter's a few minutes before, she felt that perhaps in both instances

there was the same comfort, and the same help to bear the same trial. After a minute's silence, Walter said—

“You look tired; perhaps you are not so strong as my sister is who never has an ache or pain.”

“Oh, I am very well,” was Agatha's reply, “but I dislocated my ankle a few months ago, and I have only just begun to use my foot again; so I am rather tired with the walk from St. Mary's here.”

“Ah, I dare say it was harder for you to bear lying up for a few weeks, than it is for me to be always helpless and useless, or seemingly useless,” he added, correcting himself. “I have longings sometimes, however, to take a good scamper, like other fellows, but there is no help for it; I must grin and bear it. It is more than I did once, and I don't say but it is awfully hard not to conjugate the verb to grumble, even now. Isn't it a beautiful view from this window,” he said, changing the subject suddenly; “that sea must be as blue as the Mediterranean, I am sure; and I have done nothing the last three or four days but look at it. But I suppose you see very much the same from your own house?”

“Oh no, St. Mary’s Farm is round that corner, and is quite hidden at the bottom of a valley, and the hills rise between it and the sea. I can hear the waves breaking on the rocks; but all the time I used to lie in the garden in that hot weather, unable to get any further, it was so tantalizing not to be able to see the water.”

Then they got upon various subjects of books, and drawing, and music, and then the luncheon-bell rang, and Susan and Clara, with a demure little maiden of fourteen, came into the room. When Agatha saw Clara without her hat she was still more struck with her beauty. But her face wanted animation, and she had a lazy, indolent way of dragging out her words, as if it were too much trouble to her to talk at all. A greater, or more marked contrast to Susan, with her quick, almost rapid utterance, and blythe, brisk manner, could not have been found.

Walter was lifted by a servant into a chair on wheels, and took his place at the table, opposite his aunt, who was already seated, and reading several letters, which the mid-day post had brought. She was apparently so much engrossed with them, that Walter was provoked. It seemed to him scarcely good manners, when a

stranger was present, to whom, as yet, she had not addressed a word.

“What a voluminous correspondence, Aunt Cecilia; will you resign that interesting sheet for a moment, and give Miss Moore some beef?”

Miss Battiscombe put down her letters and complied, remarking, she hoped Walter himself would eat a good luncheon.

“This letter is from Mrs. Ponsonby,” she continued. “She is at Torminster with the Scotts, and will come over here.”

“Oh, horrors!” exclaimed Walter. “I suppose she has some particular and dear friend to come and visit.”

“I don’t admire that tone, Walter, when you speak of your father’s relation. Mrs. Ponsonby sees a good deal of the best society, and is extremely good-natured.”

“Well, I don’t know that, Aunt Cecilia,” said Susan. “Did you find her the essence of good nature when you were put under her protection last year, for that long journey, Agatha?” asked Susan. For recollections of Mrs. Ponsonby’s fulsome flatteries to people she wished to cultivate, and rudeness to those she did not think worth her attentions, rose in Susan’s mind.

Agatha smiled. “Oh, she was good-

natured enough for the purpose; she allowed me to sit in the same carriage with her, and I suppose that was all that was necessary. I was so wretched myself that day, that I am sure I must have been a stupid companion."

It was the first time Agatha had spoken, and Miss Battiscombe looked at her with that sort of appraising glance which is not flattering. Not at all a provincial way of speaking, she thought; a ladylike voice and manner. Then, aloud—

"Miss Moore, will you have some of this pudding? How was it you travelled with Mrs. Ponsonby, may I ask?"

Agatha related the story in a few words, and then Susan said—

"Aunt Cecilia, I surely have told you of Miss Moore's leaving the Harrisons, who lived at Shadrington Court, when they went abroad, and all about it?"

"Really, Susan, if you have, I had forgotten it. Let me see," referring to another letter, "those people are mentioned in Frederick's letter. They have had money losses, and are coming here in a few weeks. Frederick says a friend of his, their son—yes, their son—wants to employ us to look out for a house for them. Fred

is always so excessively cool in making his requests. It is very unlikely that we should trouble ourselves as to where the Harrisons are to find a house. There are plenty of cheap lodgings in the town, and on the other side of the hill, I hear; so Miss Bromfield, the clergyman's daughter, told me yesterday."

"When is Fred Henley coming, auntie," Clara asked.

"Next week, for a day or two."

"I am glad of that," Clara said; "Fred has always something amusing to tell, and is great fun, his stories are so absurd."

"Yes," Susan remarked, "and if looked upon as pure fiction they are all very well, but Frederick often deludes himself in the first place, and other people in the second, that what he is saying is true, when it is exactly the opposite. Moreover, I have always an uncomfortable feeling that Fred plays off his pleasantries on me, when my back is turned—why should not he?"

Agatha remembered Captain Henley's laughable account of Miss Battiscombe, her age, and her peculiarities; and as the lady in question began a lively defence of her favourite nephew, and said she had so keen a sense of the ludicrous herself, that she could enter into

Fred's witticisms better than most people, a smile passed over her face.

“ ‘Brevity is the soul of wit,’ somebody said,” Walter now remarked, “and if that is true, Fred Henley's wit is questionable. He bores me to death with stories of a heap of people I have never seen, and these tales are often ‘one big lie,’ as the German governess said in defence of one with whom she had once lived, and who had been kind to her, and whom a whole room-full of amiable people were abusing.”

“Well, we will leave those sweeping accusations to German governesses, if you please, Walter ;” and Miss Battiscombe then proceeded to arrange that Laura and Clara should drive with her to do some shopping in Havensmouth, and that afterwards they should proceed to the five o'clock tea at Mount Hermon, “leaving Susan to her particular engagement.”

A sharp, almost angry retort was on Susan's lips, but she checked herself, and she proposed to Agatha to come into the drawing-room again. The afternoon passed only too fast, and Agatha was sorry when, at half-past six, her chair was announced ; and when Susan went up to dress for dinner, she had to jolt down the rough lane to St. Mary's.

"I hope you have had as pleasant an afternoon as we have," Walter said, when, the ceremony of dinner over, from which he excused himself on the plea of being tired, his aunt and sisters had rejoined him.

"Oh, it was very dull," said Clara, yawning. "Aunt Cecilia, what could you find to like in that little vulgar dressed-up woman in the wonderful pink bonnet?"

"You show your discrimination, Clara, I must say; that little vulgar dressed-up woman was Lady Merlin. The Earl is here from ill health."

"Like everybody else," put in Walter. "Havensmouth is a hospital on a large scale, I think, but as I am in one of the wards myself, I must hold my tongue about it."

"Lord Merlin is coming to see you tomorrow, Walter, so you can compare notes; and Lady Merlin was quite charmed to find me here. It is very lucky for your sisters that so many people with whom I have a link are wintering at Havensmouth, and plenty more are coming. You will get some good parties, Clara."

"That's a comfort, I am sure," was Clara's reply.

"And I have had a lady recommended to me

as daily governess for Laura," Miss Battiscombe continued; "and I will give you, Clara, and Susan too, lessons in music from Signor Bianco, if you choose to accept them. He teaches Lady Turberville's daughters, and is a first-rate musician."

"Thank you, auntie," said Clara, "I shall like that very much;" and she went to open the piano to play.

"Wait one minute, Claribel," said her brother, "I want to hear first what Aunt Cecilia thought of Susan's friend, Miss Moore."

"Poor Walter, you have entered the lists now, and having thrown down the gauntlet, you will have to do battle as a true knight," said Susan.

"Think! oh, well, she is very passably lady-like. It is wonderful, I am sure; but I should imagine, though so quiet and prim at first, she is a girl who might be inclined to become too free, and express her opinions without being asked for them, when the first shyness, the result of having seen nothing of society, wears off."

"I hope it may prove so," was Susan's reply; "I like having a friend who will contradict me; indeed, I could not have one who agreed with me on all occasions. I always had a feeling that Agatha Moore would suit me, and so it has proved."

"You always like your own way, Susan, I know; I heard you contesting the point with your father, just before you came here, about some people in Northborough you wished him to ask to dinner, but I am glad to say he did not yield to your fancies."

"I remember the contest you mean, very well, auntie, and papa was obliged to acknowledge that personally he liked Mr. and Mrs. Haynes twenty times better than most of the people who were coming to that dinner, only as they did not dine with the other members of the venerable canonical body, he could not ask them to his house. Dear father! he is under the strict rule of ecclesiastical bondage in this as in some other things, but in his heart he agrees with me, I know."

"We are travelling a long way from Miss Moore," said Walter; "and I, for one, mean to give my opinion about her. I think she is charming and agreeable. I have not had such a pleasant afternoon for ever so long, and she is coming here very often to help me with my drawing, and read to me and amuse me, and I don't mean to allow her to be snubbed or sat upon, or treated as if she were a stick or a stone. And what is more," Walter continued, looking at his aunt,

and his large eyes kindling almost fiercely, "I hate to see people shirked and snubbed because they don't happen to know this person or that, or belong to some distinguished old countess or duchess, rigged out in pink bonnets and finery. Miss Moore suits my taste exactly, and if she is treated rudely, I shall tell my father."

"Walter! Walter!" said both his sisters, entreatingly, for they dreaded any open warfare with their aunt, at this early stage of the winter they were to spend with her.

But Miss Battiscombe, with provoking calmness, only said, "You poor dear boy! I make every excuse for you, knowing how little you have seen of the world, and how indulged you have been all your life. But don't excite yourself, or you will have a bad night."

"Excite myself," said Walter, "yes, I will excite myself; and you may as well know what I think first as last, Aunt Cecilia. I am nearly seventeen, and were I not a miserable cripple, I should be allowed to hold an opinion and choose my own friends. As it is, I wish you to know that, whether it is Miss Moore or that poor curate's wife, or doctor's niece, who called yesterday, and whom you treated in precisely the same manner, I wish you to know I won't have it

here, in my father's house, for this is my father's house while we live in it. I cannot endure to lie here helpless, and see poor women, every bit as well educated and well born as we are, perhaps, turned into stone with Medusa-like looks, because they have done us the civility of calling on us."

"How very classical you are getting in your allusions, Walter; but certainly Miss — what is her name? showed no symptoms of being petrified to-day; so your pretty simile does not hold good, I am afraid."

"No, she didn't, because she has some pluck and spirit, and treated you as she ought. But those people yesterday were of different stuff. Don't you think I saw how wretched they looked when you answered them in monosyllables, and even began to inquire if the carriage had come round, and how they backed out of the room at last, poor things, as if they had had enough of such conduct?"

"Walter, I really am not going to consult you on my manners; and till I do, I beg you will keep your advice to yourself. You are simply very impertinent; but you show your entire ignorance, so I only pity you."

"Pity me," said the boy, getting really very angry; "I pity those who have that touch of

vulgarity in their natures that must play off airs on people they think beneath them. Grant that your visitors are not gentlewomen, is that any reason why you should forget you are one, I should like to know?"

"Oh, Walter, pray do be quiet," Susan again interposed; "you really should not speak to Aunt Cecilia in that way."

But Miss Battiscombe had swept her long train out of the room, and shut the door with a suspicious click before Susan's remonstrance had left her lips.

"Pray don't quarrel with Aunt Cecilia," Clara said; "she is very kind to us, you know, and Signor Bianco's lessons are very expensive."

Then, returning to her music, Clara began to play in her own dreamy fashion, and Walter relapsed into silence, only speaking to snap at Susan, if she attempted to talk to him, and to conjugate, as he had said to Agatha, the verb "to grumble" in all its tenses.

But after he had gone to his room, and his faithful attendant and nurse had left him for the night, he rang his bell, and she returned.

"I want to speak to Miss Cavendish," he said. "Nurse, will you ask her to come here?"

Susan obeyed the summons quickly enough. "Oh, Walter, are you ill—are you worse?"

"No, better," was the short reply. "I say, Susan, I behaved very badly this evening—kiss and be friends; and it is on my mind that you must tell Aunt Cecilia that I am sorry I was so impertinent to her. I have no right to lecture my elders and superiors, and lose my temper while I am doing it, too."

Susan bent over her brother, and kissed him again and again. "Never mind, darling old Walter, you are so seldom cross now, as you used to be," she said; "and all you said to auntie was true—only——"

"Only it was altogether wrong of me to attack Aunt Cecilia as I did," he said. "What good have I done? It will only make her try to snub people all the more. When Morris read the second lesson, which she always does now——"

"Morris! Why, Walter, that is a new plan."

"Not very. She has done it for the last six months. She is a good creature, and reads the Bible well, because she is in earnest about it. Well, there were some words in the lesson which seemed to strike home to me, snapping and growling as I had been all the evening; and I

am very sorry I made you all so uncomfortable. Mind you tell Aunt Cecilia. Good-night."

Susan delivered Walter's message, and Miss Battiscombe not only received it graciously, but went herself to Walter's room to bid him good-night, and ask if he had everything he wanted.

"Oh, yes; I am all right, Aunt Cecilia. I beg your pardon for the way in which I spoke to you this evening. I am very sorry, as I hope Susan has told you."

"It is not necessary to say any more about it," was the reply. "I hope Morris has not forgotten Dr. Hastings' order about the cream you were to have—the Devonshire cream—with your coffee in the morning. Miss Bromfield told me the best was to be had at St. Mary's Farm, from your friend's relations. I suppose you will like it all the better if it comes from there?"

"Of course, I shall," said Walter, good-temperedly; "and so will you, in due time, Aunt Cecilia. Good-night."

The next two or three weeks brought about a change in Agatha's life. Her friendship with Susan Cavendish, having its link in the past, grew and strengthened, and there were few days when some excuse was not found for her to go to the Firs, to show Walter how to put a bit of

background into a picture, to read to him, to help Laura through a difficulty in her German translation, to enter into some of Susan's various manias for wood-carving, illumination, modelling, or other handicrafts, which she would sometimes eagerly take up for a day or two, and then resign an old favourite for a new.

"It is so like you, Susan," said Miss Battiscombe, one day, when a heap of chips, and tools, and a fragment of a bracket were turned out of a box in a corner of the drawing-room. "I hope little Miss Moore may not share the fate of this bracket, and find herself suddenly dispossessed for a new *protégée*."

"How I hate that word!" said Susan, angrily; and then immediately regaining her good temper, she said, "I don't think I cast off my friends in a general way, auntie; and you will find it hard to bring an accusation against me which can be proved in this particular. This poor bracket is a miserable failure. I hope our carpet-dance will not prove like it, this evening. Who could have believed, in less than five weeks we should have collected such a heap of things, and made a rummage like this necessary. Heaps upon heaps in this corner! It is really extraordinary; and it is a comfort mamma is not here."

"It would be a comfort if she were, you mean," said Miss Battiscombe. "You have a wonderful knack of filling a room with rubbish; but one misses one's own servants in these hired houses."

"I am sure Morris does her best," said Susan; "and I think, if Annette helped a little sometimes, it would not hurt her."

"My maid is not used to housemaid's work," said Miss Battiscombe; "and really, she scarcely gets through all I want of her."

Which was true. Annette, or Mrs. Bright, as she loved to be called, was ornamental and useful too, in her way; and that way was the turning out of her mistress every evening in the best possible taste; so arranging scanty hair that it looked abundant; so covering weak points, and bringing out strong ones, that she was called a treasure by Miss Battiscombe's envious friends. But she was very high and mighty, and never descended to forget her place, as she would say. She took her tone from her mistress, as most servants do; and consequently Agatha's white muslin and pink sash received a very contemptuous touch, as she took off her cloak that evening, on her emerging from the midge which had been sent for her; and the

wreath of ivy in her hair, which had been gathered from the "narrowing nunnery walls," was remarked upon to Morris as "a great mistake."

"I don't see that," said Morris; "she's a very pretty young lady, and just of that sort fine dress and artificial flowers would spoil."

"Lor! Mrs. Morris, how you talk! as if any *lady* wore anything but French flowers in their heads; but then, it is all very well for one coming out of a farm-house, no doubt; and I don't say but the effect is good, though it is a mistake to wear real ivy unless there's *Stephanotis* or *pelargoniums* intermixed."

Further remarks were stopped by the arrival of other guests—this time, people to whom Mrs. Annette was obsequious—as might be seen in the way in which she smoothed the trailing skirts, and drew them down into their proper place—half a yard on the ground.

Miss Battiscombe knew how to make an evening pass off well. First, music—enough, but not more than enough, to please her guests; and then the little quadrille, and perhaps a waltz, in the other half of the drawing-room, separated from the one where Walter lay on his sofa by folding doors. It all fell in naturally and easily, and Agatha really enjoyed watching

others, and scarcely liked to leave her nook by Walter's sofa, nor caring that, as all the other young ladies were taken off to dance, she was left behind.

"You must dance," Walter said. "I wonder Susan has forgotten to bring you a partner."

"Oh, no, thank you," she exclaimed, "I don't care about it. I have not danced for so long, and never at a grown-up party; besides, my foot might turn weak, if I tried."

"Agatha, promise me the next quadrille," said a voice, a few minutes later, which she knew well.

"Eustace!" and then the colour flushed to her cheeks.

"Yes, I am come here with Henley to-night. We intended to arrive in time for dinner, but, as usual, missed the train which would have brought us here for that desirable purpose. It is blowing a perfect hurricane to-night. I have left my father and mother and my sisters at Torminster; they come on here to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" Agatha exclaimed. "Beatrice wrote to me last from Dieppe, and said she thought they should stay there."

"They have changed their minds since then. I will tell you all about it when we have our

quadrille. Henley, I see, is already spinning through that galop." Then he turned to Walter, with whom he had had some slight acquaintance in years gone by, and remarked on the beauty of his sister Clara, saying he had never seen her before, he thought.

"Oh, yes you have, in the chrysalis stage," said Walter, "she is a good deal younger than Susan, and you don't recognize her in her butterfly plumage."

Clara did indeed look beautiful, and Eustace wandered back to the partition to have a nearer view of her as she rested for a moment on her cousin Captain Henley's arm to take breath before she resumed the dance.

"How I should have envied them a year ago," Walter said, "I could not have lain here and seen it all."

"You don't care now, then?" Agatha asked.

"I do care in one way, though not in another. I would rather my sisters did not dance so much; so I care about that: but if I were on my legs to-morrow, and had a power of locomotion equal to Fred Henley, who seems to be going at the rate of a humming-top, I think I am almost sure I would not dance myself."

"Would not you," said Agatha, "there is no

harm in it surely, not in a private dance like this."

"I can't discuss that," Walter said, "I don't feel myself in the least worthy to do it, taking the high ground from which all these things should be looked at; but of one thing I am quite certain, that clergymen's families should not run about the country to go to balls, perhaps not have these quiet carpet-dances at home. Aunt Cecilia is head here for the time, I know; but I think, as our father's name is well known in the Church as canon of a Cathedral, and in other ways, too, it is a great mistake that we should be mixing up ourselves with the gayest set of people wherever we go; and that even at Northborough my sisters should be taken to balls in the neighbourhood, and people should see their names, and say, 'if Canon Cavendish allows his daughters to go, why should we not allow ours?' I dare say this sounds to you very straight-laced, and as if I were setting myself up, as usual, to know better than my elders, but you see I have nothing to do but to think and to read, so I am apt to make up my own mind about things, and deliver judgment as if I were a grey-haired sage. A year ago it was all quite different. I was a wretched, whining, selfish idiot, making my own life

miserable and every one else too. Some day I will tell you who I have to thank for setting me off in a better way. I owe her what no tongue can tell. Perhaps you have heard her name—Lady Harriet Greville.”

“Oh yes,” said Agatha, eagerly, “I have only seen her twice that I remember. Once for half an hour in a railway carriage, and once for scarcely more than half a minute in the street here; but I shall never forget her. Is she so very good?”

“Good! She has just got that which thousands of us miss. She is a true soldier fighting under the right colours and never deserting them. She has made her stand, and by influence and example has done more than multitudes by words and profession. She came to dine and sleep at our house at Northborough a year ago, and Mr. Greville fell ill, and so they stayed nearly a week. She saw me in one of my worst moods, captious and wretched, and suffering awfully from some new scheme the doctors were trying on me just then. She pitied me with all her heart, and she told me the truth about myself, which my father and mother, always so kind, never had done; and she showed me under whose banner I ought to serve, poor crippled me, and she breathed a new hope into me, and sent me to look for help whence it

only comes. I'll tell you more some day, not now. I hope you won't call me a prig for talking so. Even you have often seen me deserting my colours and shirking the fight ; but for all that, I do try hard to do battle, and I want every one I love and care for to do it too. Talking is nothing, however, and so I will shut up. Lady Harriet is not one of many words ; it is what she *is* which makes the little she does say go so far and carry such weight."

" Ah," said Agatha, almost involuntarily, " I know some one of that kind ; Mr. Bruce. I think, I am sure, you would like him."

" Why does he not come and see me, then ? I heard Susan say that he seemed very nice. Tell him I can't pay any visits, and that I should be so glad if he would come."

Here Eustace Harrison came to claim her for the quadrille, and for the rest of the evening Agatha was in the zenith of enjoyment. Eustace made himself, as usual, most agreeable ; and having told the story of his father's failing health and wretched spirits, and of the increasing weight of money troubles which lay upon him, and of his craving, restless desire to get back to England, a desire which his mother could no longer gainsay, he turned to other subjects, and Agatha forgot

everything for the time, but that Eustace was with her, and seemed as glad to talk to her and to hear her talk as she was to be with him and to listen to all he said. The clock striking twelve awoke her from her dream.

“Oh, I must go now,” she said; “the midge must have come for me. Would you take me to it, Eustace, please?”

“There is no haste, surely? Why, it is quite early, and the ‘midge,’ as Havensmouth people call it, can wait.”

“It is not early for St. Mary’s Farm; and Mrs. Hope is not well, and it will disturb her if I go home so late. Do let me bid Susan good-night, and then I really must go.”

Susan was found, and good-night was said; and then Miss Battiscombe just touched Agatha’s hand with her fingers, scarcely pausing in an animated conversation with the little “vulgar dressed-up woman” Clara had spoken of, not now in a pink bonnet, but in a sweeping gown of rose-coloured silk, made in the same fashion as that of the fairest and youngest girl in the room.

“Who is that?” Lady Merlin asked as Agatha turned away.

“That! oh some little girl who has friends near Northborough, and to whom Susan wishes

to be civil. But now, was it not absurd of Lady Turberville to say that?"

"Oh! very," was the somewhat abstracted remark. "Really, that girl has some style about her, though it is a pity she is not better dressed."

"Beg your pardon, miss, for coming so slow down the lane," said the driver as he stopped at the gate of the farm, "but the gale is terrible strong, and I have been up and down the hills in the teeth of it so many times to-night, my horse is nearly spent."

The gale was indeed as the man said, "terrible strong," and the roaring of the sea sounded like the continuous report of artillery.

"There's a sea running in off Redsand to-night such as is seldom seen; they do say the life-boat has been put off, and the harbour down town is crammed with small craft, not that they get much rest there either, for the water is washing over the Strand, and the waves have got up to the shop-fronts."

All this was blown to Agatha's ears in fitful starts, as the man stood waiting for the door to be opened that he might let down the steps. At last a light appeared, and Agatha hurried up the flag-path, and was almost blown into the passage.

"Am I very late, Elsie?" she asked; and the kitchen clock striking one answered her question: but it was not Elsie who held the door for her to pass. It was with some difficulty Mr. Bruce forced it to close again, and then bolted it.

"I am sorry you sat up for me," she said, "I intended to be home by eleven, but somehow the time went so fast. I have enjoyed myself so much. It was quite a large party, and I liked watching the people dance."

"Did you dance too?"

"Yes; but only twice with my cousin Eustace, Mr. Harrison. They are all coming to Havensmouth to-morrow. I was so surprised to hear it."

They had reached the door of the sitting-room now, where a bright fire was still shining.

"Won't you warm yourself for a few minutes?" he said, "for it is cold as well as stormy. A fearful night at sea."

She let her cloak fall off, and sat down in her usual seat. He stood by looking upon her very much as he had done that Sunday long before. He saw how bright and lustrous her eyes were, and how her cheek was crimson and her lips parted by a smile. She looked so happy and so radiant in her white dress, and the glossy ivy-

wreath shining in the firelight as it rested on the wavy masses of her soft brown hair.

He felt old, and worn, and jaded by her side, and the thought struck him, "It is far better as it is—she was right and I was wrong." And yet he felt the daily struggle he made was almost too much for him, and it was a relief when Agatha suddenly looked up and said—

"I have been thinking that perhaps, as Uncle Robert is so broken down in health, and so unhappy, that he may like to have me to live with him again. Eustace said something of the kind to-night, and perhaps it would be the best plan."

"Perhaps it would," he said, coldly.

"I don't know, of course," she went on, "what Aunt Anna may say, as she was so anxious to get rid of me a year ago, she may be equally unwilling to have me back;" and her lip curled with its old proud expression. "Nevertheless, if I can be of use to Uncle Robert, I shall forget everything else, and try to be a comfort to him."

He made no further remark, nor changed his position, as he stood leaning one arm on the chimney-piece, his head bent, and his eyes fixed on her.

Presently she rose, and said "Good-night.

How the wind blows. I hope the house won't come down and bury us in its ruins before the morning." And with these words she was gone, leaving behind her one who was doing brave battle with self—one like those of whom Walter Cavendish had spoken, who never forgot whose banner he fought under, and whose soldier he was. True to his colours, faithful and true of heart; and from him little Agatha had turned away, and had chosen her own path apart from him. Ah, well, it is given to many of us to do likewise, and to have rough awakenings from dreams such as she dreamed that night, when the storm raged more and more fiercely, and sleep was impossible. To mistake true for false, and false for true, is common enough. There are thousands doing the same at this very moment—thousands forging a life-long trouble for themselves, tens of thousands in this purblind race of ours. Agatha fell into a light sleep about six o'clock, and was awakened from it by Elspeth's voice in the passage, at Mr. Bruce's study door.

"It's the lad John Page, sir. He says he thinks there's some poor creatures clinging to the point of St. Mary's Pillar. He wants you to come and speak to him about it."

"I will come directly," Mr. Bruce said; and

then she heard his steps following Elsie's down-stairs. Agatha jumped up and looked out of the window; the faint wintry dawn was creeping over the leaden sky, and, though the force of the wind seemed a little abated, the roar of the sea was as loud as ever. Agatha felt impelled to dress herself quickly, and, putting on her waterproof cloak and hat, to go out and see the waves, which must be so grand, she thought, rolling in at the cove. As she was going down the passage Mrs. Hope put her head out of the door.

"Who is that? Not you, Agatha!"

"Yes; I am going to watch the waves. I could not sleep all night; and, as I have been kept awake by the storm, I think it is fair I should see the effect of it in the cove. Is your cold better?"

"Not much," said Mrs. Hope. "I could not sit up for you last night till eleven o'clock, but I told Elspeth to do so. I must now take another hour's rest, my head is so heavy."

Agatha waited to hear no more, but set off at full speed down the lane. As she got near the Pages' cottage she heard a sharp, high-pitched voice she knew well, raised even above its accustomed tone. Philip was the listener, buttoned up in his great blue coat, and his legs

encased in stout fustian leggings—he was standing by the Pages' gate.

“A pair of headstrong boys, they are,” Mrs. Page was saying; “they’ll be off in that sea as sure as fate, after some poor creature, who may be has perished by this time, and they’ll be leaving me a poor lone woman with a little cripple to support. Now, Philip Smith, go ye down and stop the boys from their mad scheme; or, stay, I’ll come myself. I’ll give it to Mr. Bruce if he tempts them boys to their destruction, for all he’s such a saint, and sets himself up so, I’ll give him my mind. My boys are as much to me as the Queen’s—I, a poor, hard-working widow woman. I’ll just go in and quiet the child Jessie, and then I’ll be after you, master.”

Mrs. Page rushed down the path to her own door, and was too excited to take any notice of Agatha, who waited till Philip stumped across the lane to where she stood.

“My eyes! that there woman’s tongue passes my belief. Elsie’s is like a mill stream, and Jeanie’s like a brook, chatter and chatter all day, but Betsy Page’s is like a storm, a roaring and a raging, and——”

Here Philip was cut short by a tremendous blast of wind which caught him as he turned from

the shelter of the hedges into the open field, and, blowing off his broad-brimmed felt hat, chased it madly across the grass, while Philip went after it at a jog-trot, ducking every now and then as he thought he was about to seize his prey. But the wind had the best of it, and Philip saw his hat disappear over the cliff, considerably above the path leading to the cove, and rejoined Agatha without it, a great black and yellow handkerchief tied in its place over his scanty, grizzled hair.

"The master'll be off in that boat of the Pages' afore we get there," he said; "see if he isn't. Elspeth sent me to stop him. She was afraid the missis should want her, or she'd have come herself, and that would have let it out to the missis where the master is gone. I stop Master Roland, indeed! A likely matter, 'specially if it is as John Page said, a woman on the rock and a child; he'll try to save 'em, risk or no risk."

It was with some difficulty Agatha got down the rugged pathway leading to the cove. The wind seemed to baffle her at every turn, and the rain had made the footing slippery and uncertain. In the bend of the cove, beneath the shelter of the piece of rock under which Agatha had first seen Johnnie Page and his little sister, a group was gathered round the boat. As Agatha

reached it she heard Mr. Bruce's voice, clear and loud, even above the roar of the sea.

"The tide is near the turn, Jim, you think?"

"Yes," said Jim, "just within half an hour, not so much, and the storm is going down. If we go out with the tide to the pillar, maybe we shall just get it to drive us ashore, a trifle too quick for some folks' fancy, perhaps; but the pillar stands almost in a line from us, and the waves break in slant-ways with this wind. There's the cry again, they'll be swept off the pillar when the tide does turn, sure enough."

St. Mary's Pillar was a curious fragment of rock standing up less than half a mile from the shore, like one of Cleopatra's needles, with a rough base or platform, forming several ledges, on the upper one of which a figure could now be plainly seen crouching, apparently with a child in her arms. Every now and then a cry for help reached the shore, and once or twice an arm was wildly raised, as if in entreaty.

"Now, James Page, and Johnnie, too," said Mr. Bruce, "we must decide quickly; there is not time to send into Havensmouth for help, and, if we did, how could a boat make the point of St. Mary's Island in this sea. I am ready to make the effort, at least, to save that woman and

the shelter of the hedges into the open field, and, blowing off his broad-brimmed felt hat, chased it manly across the grass, while Philip went after it at a jog-trot, ducking every now and then as he thought he was about to seize his prey. But the wind had the best of it, and Philip saw his hat appear over the cliff, considerably above the pathway leading to the cove, and rejoined Agatha with it, a great black and yellow handkerchief in its place over his scanty, grizzled hair.

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her child. But there is danger—danger to life. I would not have either of you go without thinking well that so it is.”

The light touch of a hand on his arm made him look round, just as the boys said “We are ready, sir, look alive.”

For a moment, as Mr. Bruce took that little hand in his, the look of a tenderness and love too deep for words shone on his face, and he bent down to her and said, “Agatha, pray God to speed us, and that these brave boys may be spared to their mother. As for me, I have only Grace, poor Grace, who would want me, and she does not depend on me.”

“Oh, don’t go—pray, pray don’t go,” Agatha gasped.

But he turned from her and called to Philip, who was doing as Elsie had bid him, and was ejaculating, “You had better not, Master Roland, you had better not; lor! it’s three lives to one.”

“We want an extra hand, Philip,” said Mr. Bruce, cheerily; “come, you won’t desert me.” And Philip veered round like a weathercock, and, instead of pleading as Mrs. Page and Ellspeth had ordered him, he suddenly began to busy himself with the rope, and to help John Page to shove off the boat.

"That's right, old fellow," said his master ;
"now stop one moment."

He lifted his hat, and bent his head instinctively. The two boys did the same, and Philip released his grizzly locks from the red and yellow handkerchief, as his master said,

"Let us ask God to speed us in our errand, and bring us safe ashore again with that poor woman and her child."

A few words of prayer followed, and then Mr. Bruce said,

"Under your orders, Jim, let us look alive, as you say."

He was joining in the loud ahoy of the two sailor boys, and putting his shoulder to the boat, when he turned back once more to Shag, who sat gazing at the scene with wistful eyes, almost human in their expression, and speaking to the dog for a moment, the next he was entering, heart and soul into the business in hand. Whatever it was he said Shag understood him ; he drew nearer to Agatha, and she sat down on one of the rounded boulders to watch and to try to pray, throwing one arm round Shag's neck for a stay and comfort.

Through the boiling surf went the boat ; then Jim and Johnnie leaped in. Jim, as the most

experienced sailor, took the rudder, Mr. Bruce one oar, and Johnnie another, while old Philip was busy uncoiling a long rope; then the boat mounted the first great billow, and was lost to sight, till it appeared again on the crest of a second. So for a few minutes, which might have been hours, Agatha watched it, with a strained and eager gaze, she was altogether unconscious of Mrs. Page's presence and angry vociferations, and that a few people had collected by this time in the cove.

At length the pillar was reached, and with evident difficulty the boat was brought as near to the ledge as possible. Then Agatha saw Mr. Bruce stand up, and with the rope round his waist, plunge into the seething surf, and gain the upper ledge of the base of the pillar.

"The tide has turned!" she heard a voice say. "They'd have been too late in another ten minutes; but the storm is going down fast. What is he about now? Fastening the rope to the poor creature. She don't seem to have much life in her, as far as I see. That's right!—he's been and done it—now then!"

Back into the surf again with his burden, the rope is pulled in by strong hands, and Roland Bruce is safe in the boat once more with the rescued woman.

“Ah, but how will they make for land?” said another voice; “that’ll be the pinch.”

The little boat was tossed about by the waves, and for some time made no progress towards the shore. Three men had ropes ready, and stood waiting to haul her in when within reach; but as the breakers of the returning tide dashed on the beach, the perils of the boat increased.

At last there was a shout, “That wave will bring her in!” and the three men advanced knee-deep into the surf. On came the advancing billow, and on came the boat, like a child’s toy, in that resistless sea. Agatha started to her feet, and saw Mr. Bruce turn his head to look at the wave, and Jim and his brother pull with a long determined stroke shoreward.

The wave came; but a retreating one met it, and the dash of the surf, rising in a great cloud, kept the spectators in suspense for a moment. Agatha hid her eyes, and when she uncovered them again it was to see Shag rush wildly to the water’s edge, where no trace of the boat was visible, only four black figures struggling in the surf. But the men with the rope were prompt and brave, and one by one those who had risked their lives for others were drawn up, before the

next wave, in its retreat, had time to suck them back.

The two Pages were on their feet in a very short time, wringing the water from their rough jackets, and slapping old Philip on the back, who was bewildered and shaken, with an injunction to cheer up, he was all safe, and had done something to be proud of.

Meantime the rest of the people were gathered round Mr. Bruce, and trying to unfasten the cord which bound the woman he had saved to him, and who lay senseless, with the child tied to her breast in a sleep which would know no waking, for the baby was dead.

"We can't unfasten the rope, sir, unless you move," one of the men said; and as Agatha bent over Mr. Bruce, she exclaimed,

"I think he can't move. Oh! I am afraid he is hurt! Oh! are you hurt, Roland?"

The sound of his name from her made him open his eyes, and that rare sweet smile shone over his face as he looked up at her.

"No, I am only out of breath," he said, faintly. "Is she saved?"

"Yes, sir, yes, as I believe," said one of the men; "but she is senseless, poor thing, and the baby is dead. It is bound tight to her side; it

must have been done by some poor fellow who is lost, before he went down."

Mr. Bruce was raised into a sitting position, and at last set free.

"Carry her to the farm," he said, quickly; "and send for a doctor. Johnnie, and you, my brave fellow, come here and shake hands."

The two boys, who were undergoing a series of alternate hugs and scoldings from their mother, broke away from her now, and came as they were bid.

"Well," he said, "let us not forget to thank God that we are safe, and have saved that woman from a terrible death. Go home, boys, and you, Philip, and change your wet clothes."

"I don't stir till you do, sir," said Philip. "You'll catch your death sitting there."

"He is faint," said Johnnie. "I see how it is," and as he spoke Mr. Bruce's head fell back again on one of the men's shoulders, and his eyes closed again. But it was only, as he said, from exhaustion and fatigue. Presently he made a great effort to rally himself, and standing up tottered towards the path. Agatha kept close to him on one side, and he leaned on Jim Page on the other.

"I wish we could have saved more of the

crew," the young sailor said, "for I expect the craft struck on St. Mary's Island, and the tide carried her round the point of the cove, and washed this woman and the child on the ledge of the pillar. They must have been out of their senses to have come landward in a night like last."

"I dare say they were making for Havensmouth harbour," said Johnnie.

"Yes, but the 'Mermaid' put in yesterday morning—our captain saw what was brewing, and he's always right, though there was not a speck in the sea or sky twelve hours before the storm broke."

"Now go in, boys; there is your mother waiting to dry you and send you to bed."

Mrs. Page greeted her sons at the gate with a torrent of words, telling them to make haste, and not stand chattering there; but she supposed as they hadn't lost their lives by drowning, they thought they would try another way, and get their deaths by cold.

A scornful laugh from Jim, and the words, "as if a sailor cared for a ducking; he wasn't going to be bothered like that," showed the difference between the brothers, for Johnnie said,

"Thank you, mother; I shall be glad of some

dry clothes, and some good hot stuff, for it's cold enough in the water, and out of it too to-day. Good morning, sir," he added, as Mr. Bruce and Agatha moved away. "I hope you will not get cold; and thank you, sir, for putting us in the way of doing this. Now I must find my little Jess."

Mr. Bruce and Agatha were thus once more left to go up that lane together. The men had got to the farm by this time with their burden, and the few stragglers had hastened after them, anxious to see all that was to be seen of the pale young face of the shipwrecked woman, with her dead baby at her breast.

Agatha walked on in silence by Mr. Bruce's side, now and then looking up at him, and wondering at his calm courage in the face of danger, and his composure now that his mission was accomplished, and, as they hoped, a life saved. Shag went on in front with stately and measured tread; and Philip, who felt himself something of a hero, and longed to tell his exploits to Elspeth and Jeanie, finding that his master could now walk without the support of his arm, hastened on to relieve himself by a history of his prowess, and to be regaled with creature comforts by Elspeth's hand.

So it was alone that Roland Bruce and Agatha again passed under the arch of the wicket-gate.

“The words have proved true again,” he said. “As I went out two hours ago I thought of them, and they braced me to my duty; and thank God, the lives of those two sons of Mrs. Page have been preserved, as well as Philip’s. As for my own——” he stopped, and looked down at Agatha; her eyes were full of tears, and she murmured,

“You are so brave, and noble, and good. You never think of yourself. When I saw you going out to meet those great waves, and never shrinking or being in the least afraid, I felt what it was to be his servant and serve Him.”

“Yes,” he answered; “He is a Master whose service is always easy, when you give it to Him without reserve; but going out to meet those big waves was by no means hard. I have had far fiercer billows to encounter.”

She almost felt what he meant, for at that moment the truth did come home to her that he—this brave, unselfish, heroic man—loved her as no one else had ever done, or, perhaps, would ever do; but she shrank away from him with an almost imperceptible movement, and at that moment,

Mrs. Hope, pale and evidently excited in a most unusual degree, came out of the house.

"Grace, Grace, go back; you have a bad cold," he said. "Is the woman living?"

"Yes, oh yes, Roland, but she is a French woman, poor soul, and we cannot understand a word she says. She is in agonies of grief about her child. But, Roland, are you hurt—are you?" She drew him into the house, and then recovering her usual calm self-possession and decision, she said, "You must go to bed, instantly, Roland, or you will be ill. But oh, Roland, a telegram has come from Scotland, from Glenbarrow, from them an of business, Mr. Mackenzie; Nigel Bruce is dead, and they want you to go there immediately."

Agatha heard the words, and saw Mr. Bruce lean against the door of the sitting-room as if stunned by the news. "Nigel Bruce is dead"; and in those words, as she knew, was involved the fact that Roland had succeeded to the estate, and was Master of Glenbarrow.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CONTRAST.

"We live two lives—a life of our deepest thoughts and feelings, that gets stirred but seldom; and a surface life among things and words."

ANON.

THE usually quiet life at St. Mary's Farm was changed for the rest of that day into confusion and excitement. Throughout the house rang the voice of the poor little Frenchwoman whom Roland Bruce had saved from the surging billows that morning, but her grief and despair at the loss of her child knew no bounds.

"Mon ange, mon ange! pourquoi m'a-t-il sauvée, et pourquoi es-tu mort? Ah, mon Dieu, il faut que je meure aussi; je ne puis vivre sans toi. Mon petit—mon ange!" Then would follow bursts of hysterical weeping, and cries which were almost too much for the watchers to endure, and which threatened to wear out the slender thread on which the life of this poor girl, apparently little more than a child in years, hung.

Only Agatha and Roland Bruce could speak to her in her own tongue, and old Elsie got impatient at the voluble expressions of sorrow which she could not understand, and the rebellious grief, so unlike anything she had ever seen before.

"You ought to be thankful you are saved from death, lassie," she kept repeating, "for sure you are little fit to die."

"Elsie, Elsie," it was Agatha who spoke, "you can't understand her, and she cannot understand you; do not speak to her—it is useless."

"*Mon enfant, veuillez me donner mon petit;*" and she made an effort to rise from the bed, only to fall back again exhausted. "*Vous êtes jeune,*" she said entreatingly, looking at Agatha, "*vous êtes jeune, peut-être la femme de ce monsieur qui m'a sauvée. Ah, ayez miséricorde; donnez-moi mon ange, mon cheri!*"

Agatha left the room and went to find Mr. Bruce; he was seated at the sitting-room table, writing orders for what was to be done in his absence. Mrs. Hope was upstairs packing his trunk, for he was to leave Havensmouth by the express train, at one o'clock.

As he raised his head when Agatha came up to him, she saw how tired and exhausted he looked.

"This has been an eventful day," he said.
"Why are you not resting yourself?"

"No, I am trying to soothe that poor little thing upstairs. Oh, it is piteous to see her. She wants her dead baby. The doctor ordered it to be taken from her when she first came to consciousness, and Elsie carried it away. It is a lovely baby, about a year old, I think. Don't you think it would soothe her to have it in the room? it would be better not to cross her. It is really terrible to see her grief. I wish you could come and speak to her. She says she has no one in the world to love but that baby; that her husband died before it was born; that she was coming over to England from Jersey, with an uncle, who had a small fishing-smack; that the boat struck on the pillar last night; that she heard the men say all was lost; and that her uncle lashed her baby to her breast, and that she found herself on that ledge of rock; when morning dawned, there was not a trace to be seen of the men or the little boat. I think it is a true story," Agatha said, "though it is all poured out with so many interjections and expressions of grief and misery, that it is difficult to understand it quite."

"I will come and see her, poor thing; but

first, Agatha, I want to tell you about the most unexpected news which greeted me this morning, when I came back from the cove. Nigel Bruce died suddenly, so the telegram states, yesterday. He had been ailing, however, for some time, and, only a month ago, I had a letter from him telling me that he did not think that his life would be a long one, and begging me to consult the welfare of his two little girls and of his wife, when I came into possession of the estate. He wished to leave me their guardian, but this I refused. It is sad to think of his dying thus suddenly; a terrible thing for the Master to come for us, and our lamps to be without light to go through the dark valley. Poor Nigel, I am heavy at heart when I think of him, for I was his nearest relation, and I never wished to have intercourse with him, but rather shrank from it; and there was something in his last correspondence with me which was touching and half reproachful."

"You will go and live, then, at Glenbarrow, I suppose?" said Agatha.

"Yes, unless Mrs. Bruce and the children wish to remain there, which is scarcely probable. It is a quiet place nestling under the Cheviots, or rather the Lowthers. Broadlaw and Lowther Hill are the striking features of the landscape. I

spent a month there when I was a boy, with my father, and remember it well." He spoke as one who is trying to talk of indifferent things, and yet had something lurking behind which he wished to bring out.

"Will you come to this poor woman now?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, gathering up his papers as he spoke; then, as she was leaving the room, he said, with a great effort, "I suppose this change in my position could make no change in your decision—the decision you gave against me last August. Now I should have much to offer you that I had not then, over and above that which will be yours while I live. Agatha, could there possibly be any hope for me?" It was not wisely said just then, nor was it put with the discrimination which he showed in other things, but not here.

"Certainly—decidedly not!" she said, with a bright crimson on her face, and a flash in her eye; "how can you think so—so meanly of me as to suppose that this could make any difference? You don't—you can't know me."

"Forgive me," he said, almost humbly; "yes, I do know you, Agatha: you are not to be judged by the common rule of most women. Don't think hardly of me for what I have said; put the true interpreta-

tion on this and on anything else I may have ever done to displease you ; lay all to the account of my great and abiding love. Let this be our parting, for I go at three o'clock, and I have many things yet to arrange." Once more, as he had done before, he laid his hand upon the small head, bent low as she stood before him, and said, once more, " May God bless you, my child !"

So they parted ; the little bark to drift far away from the goodly ship which would fain have held it close-anchored to its side. So they parted ; and for a little while we must follow Agatha in a new and different life, which is to call forth all her hidden energies, and where the seed sown in her heart by a loving hand is to spring up and bear fruit, little by little—first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

Mr. Bruce's words, spoken in her own tongue, had soothed the poor bereft mother more than anything else could have done. With his own hands he brought the dead baby to her side, and as passionate kisses fell on its pale waxen face, her tears rained down ; and in an hour from that time she was asleep.

" Je ne suis pas ingrate," she had murmured, " je ne suis pas ingrate. Vous m'avez sauvée,

monsieur, et j'offrirai des prières pour vous toute ma vie, et pour votre jeune femme, la jolie petite dame, qui est si douce et si bonne."

But Mr. Bruce had abruptly left her, before the sentence was complete, and Elsie could not understand the oft-repeated question, "Lui ai-je fait de la peine, qu'est que c'est? Pourquoi m'à-t-il quittée sans rien dire."

Then Agatha, who had been kneeling by the bed, and had heard the words, raised her face which had been hidden, and said, simply, "Je ne suis pas la femme de ce monsieur, c'est tout." "Ah!——" And the ready tact of the little Frenchwoman supplied the rest.

Agatha watched by her till she slept, and then the baby was taken away once more, and Elsie made it ready for its grave.

In the course of the afternoon Mr. Bromfield came, and Margaret, and others, who had heard the report of the shipwreck, and the heroic efforts which had been made to save the woman and the child. And while Mr. Bruce was borne swiftly away from Havensmouth, to return to it no more as his settled home, he was suddenly raised to be the hero of the hour; and his accession to a fortune by the death of a relation was even a more engrossing piece of gossip than the fact

that he had faced the storm, and gone out in a small boat to rescue a woman from St. Mary's Pillar.

Mrs. Hope gave all the particulars in her usually calm and matter-of-fact way. Margaret Bromfield's practical question, "What will you do with the woman?" was answered in an equally practical and decided tone—"She must get her own living, and I shall advise her to return to Jersey."

"Yes; or she might get a place as maid, if she is clever with her needle, and her French accent is good; but, of course, you must make inquiries about her story, and find out if it is true."

"Of course," was Mrs. Hope's answer; and then Mr. Bromfield proceeded to enter into arrangements about the baby's funeral; and Mrs. Hope referred to a memorandum about it, which Mr. Bruce had left with her, that he would be responsible for the expense of a modest funeral in the churchyard of Dunster church, or in the cemetery, as Mr. Bromfield might advise.

"I should like to look at the poor girl, if she is asleep," Margaret said, "and at the baby, too."

As she and Agatha left the room together,

Margaret said, "I have not seen much of you since your new friends have taken you up, Agatha; and my life, just now, is very dull and melancholy. You were at the Cavendishes' party last night, I heard."

"Yes," said Agatha; and she thought what an age it seemed since then, and yet it was only last night.

"And your relations, the Harrisons, are coming here, I find. How will you like that? But I suppose it will not make much difference to you; you will take flight northward with the Master of Glenbarrow."

"I shall do no such thing, Margaret," Agatha replied, almost angrily. "Do you wish to see Louise Fontaine—for that is the name of the poor girl? Please"—as Margaret ran quickly upstairs—"please take care not to wake her."

Louise was in old Elspeth's bed, who sat by her, keeping watch.

Margaret looked at her for a moment, and then said, "She is very young. Where is the baby?"

"In the master's study," said Elsie. "I could not find a better place." And there they found the little lifeless form, laid on pillows on the table, from which many papers had been removed,

and a pale China rose, with a few ivy-leaves on its breast.

“What a lovely child!” Margaret could not help exclaiming. “You put the flowers there, I know, Agatha; it is like your romantic little self to do so.”

“Poor little baby!” Agatha said, kissing its forehead; “it is safe from all the storms of the troublesome world now;” and over-tired and over-wrought as she was, it required a strong effort not to burst into tears. “I think,” she said, as Margaret turned away, “I will put on my hat, and walk part of the way home with you, if I may. I feel so restless, and till Louise wakes, there is nothing to do here.”

“Yes, do come,” said Margaret; “only, make haste, for it is getting late—nearly four. Won’t you be afraid to walk back alone? Or perhaps you expect to fall in with some Cavendishes to escort you?”

There was the same touch of annoyance in Margaret’s tone, as she mentioned the Cavendishes, and Agatha began to wonder whether it was true that it was her fault if she had not seen much of Margaret lately, and to question within herself whether that could have vexed her.

“I always foresaw,” Margaret continued, as

Agatha hastily put on her cloak and hat, "that you would be a popular person, when you had the chance, and that you would like society, and all those things; but in the days when you sprained your ankle, and had to lie here by the week together, you had only me to enliven you, and you were always glad enough to see me then."

"And I shall always be glad to see you, Margaret. I cannot think what makes you talk to me in this way to-day. Of course, I shall never forget how you have tried to make my life at St. Mary's pleasant. I don't think it is kind of you to imply that I am ungrateful."

"Well, let us go downstairs, for papa will be waiting. He must have heard Mrs. Hope's story of the accession of property, and all the rest, from beginning to end, twice over."

As they walked together up the lane, Margaret recovered all her accustomed equanimity, and felt a little vexed with herself that she had allowed Agatha to see that she was disturbed or ruffled. She liked to maintain a character for serenity and composure; and the admiration which Agatha had often expressed for these qualities in her had flattered and pleased her. Still, it was rather trying to a nature like hers to have heard from one of her father's curates

that a little Miss Moore, who "nobody" had ever seen, was much admired at the Cavendishes' party, the night before, and that one of the most gentlemanlike people there paid her great attention. Then the curate's sister aforesaid, who was at the party, also said Miss Cavendish told her she was a great friend of hers, and the lame brother had scarcely let her stir from his side; that even the Countess of Merlin had asked particularly who she was; and the beautiful heiress, Miss Clara Cavendish, had failed entirely to eclipse her. And Margaret had spent that same evening in her sick mother's room; she had been harassed in no ordinary degree throughout the day. A letter from one of the masters at Winchester had begun a series of worries by complaining of Dicksie's inattention, carelessness, and lawlessness. Then Merivale had lost all chance of success in the competitive examination for Sandhurst by backwardness in arithmetic; then some accounts she kept for her father had got into a hopeless entanglement, and she had to sit up half the night trying to solve the difficulty—that stormy night, when sleep seemed impossible to many of the inhabitants of Havensmouth, when Louise and her baby were cast upon a barren rock, while Agatha indulged her roseate

visions, and Roland Bruce sat in his study, bracing himself for duty, known and unknown, little thinking what news the telegraph wires would bring him in the morning.

It seemed so new and strange to Margaret to look on Agatha as one to be admired and almost envied; and as the Cavendishes bore down upon her with merry greetings as the two girls parted from each other at the gate of Linden Villa, Margaret's bow to Susan was so stately and dignified, that Frederick Henley began to rally Agatha on her grim friend, who looked so awfully injured and cross.

"I wanted to ask her how her mother was," Susan said; "but she would not give me the chance. Now, Agatha, you must come home to tea with us, talk over the party, and tell us if you enjoyed it."

"No, I could not, indeed, this afternoon," Agatha replied; "there is a poor girl at the farm who cannot speak a word of English, and she will be in distress when she wakes, if I am not there."

"What girl, who is it?" they asked.

And then, in a few words, Agatha told the story, and thought she had never known Captain Henley so silly, as he tried to joke about the

expedition to St. Mary's Pillar, and to laugh at the idea of that stalwart farmer turning into a hero.

"It is much more easily understood than your turning into one, Freddie," Susan said; "you know the first battle you are in you will show the white feather and run away!"

"Well, I think if I could brave out the stout farmer and his sister's awful looks last August, I could stand fire pretty well. My goodness! how the good lady, Mrs. Faith, Hope, or Charity, tried to freeze me that melting day."

"Now you must come in and see Walter," Clara said, as Agatha stopped at the turn up to Dewsbury Hill; "he will like that storm story so much; do come."

But at that moment, in the fading light of the winter's afternoon, some one was seen coming down the hill at full speed.

"Hallo, Harrison, are you back from Torminster already, and where are the old folks?"

"Just established in the Marine Hotel, till they can find a house. Agatha, come and see them, my father wants you so much, and I promised to look you up. Come, I will see you home to the farm afterwards; you must come, it is only a step to the hotel."

Agatha was tired, and dreaded the meeting with her uncle, still more with Mrs. Harrison; but she was always incapable of resisting Eustace, and as the Cavendishes and their cousin went towards the Firs, Agatha felt her arm drawn within his, and they were walking to the Marine Hotel together.

"Thank goodness we are rid of that chattering Henley," Eustace said; "he is playing a deep game, too, and I dare say he will get his auntie to back him up; what with a little court and a little flattery, he will do his best to get hold of Clara and the money-bags; or, more properly speaking, of the money-bags and Clara."

"What do you mean, Eustace? Clara would surely never marry such a brainless silly creature as Captain Henley; I can't endure him."

"Ah, my little cousin, brains do not go for as much as you may think; the great silent men are not sought after in this degenerate age. The small chattering jackdaws fare much better."

"Not with sensible people, Eustace; no woman can really like to hear such utter nonsense as your friend talks."

"My friend! why, he is only one of a thousand; I could put my finger on plenty such at

this moment, and some of them too with ugly faces instead of handsome ones, and ill-made clothes instead of unexceptionable Bond Street fits. You don't know much of the world, Agatha."

"No," she answered sadly, and she thought how desire and craving to see and to hear, and know the world, as he expressed it, had filled her mind for many, many months ; and, after all, it would be a disappointment perhaps, and half unconsciously she drew a contrast between the man who had taken a solemn and grave leave of her that very day, and those of whom her cousin spoke. Agatha's heart seemed to tell her that the difference between him and others did not lie so much in external things, or even in powers of mind and intellectual gifts, as in the hidden spring of action which lies deep like the well of water on the mountain top, fed by the dews of heaven, and replenishing the fountain and the streams, but never seen in its covert of ferns and mosses under the rocky crag, or seen only by the watching stars, as night by night they smile down into its depths with loving eyes from their places on high.

Alas for the small and foolish jealousies, the vain longings, the bitter strife, the unkindly

emulation as to who shall take the highest room ; the pride, and the falls of pride, the heart-burnings and discontents which lurk in the gay crowds of a ball-room, or the croquet-ground, and find their way, like serpents amid the flowers, into the fairest scenes where pleasure and enjoyment are sought, but how seldom found ! There is but one remedy for these, but one. Let us only plume our wings for higher flights ; let us only set our hearts on heavenly treasure, and we carry about with us the parting gift of One to his children, who is patient with our infirmity, gentle in his correction, tender in his rebukes ;— and as we are filled with His peace, His legacy to us, we rise above the stings which lie hid in the choicest earthly gifts, and we learn to prize all things for His sake, who gives them or denies them.

“You must be prepared for a change in my father, Agatha,” Eustace said ; “he talks of nothing but this money loss, and, as I expected, the lawsuit has gone against him. They are going to appeal from the decision, but it will be useless, only another three months’ suspense, and a few more hundreds spinning.”

When Agatha followed Eustace into the sitting-room of the hotel, strewn with small parcels of every description, she could

scarcely bring herself to believe that the querulous broken voice which addressed Eustace could be that of Mr. Harrison.

“Have you got the ‘Standard,’ Eustace? the Money Article is always fuller in that than in the ‘Times.’ I have rung for lamps or candles till I am tired, and I can’t imagine where your mother is.”

“Father, I have brought you something better than the ‘Standard’; here is Agatha Moore.”

“Oh, my dear; oh, my poor child!” was the exclamation, as Agatha was caught in his outstretched arms; “you are ruined by me; all your little money is gone. I wonder,” he continued, releasing Agatha, and falling into his chair again, “I wonder you can bear to come near me; I am a broken down old man now, Agatha; a mere wreck—a mere wreck.”

Eustace said he would go and look for his sisters; and Agatha and Mr. Harrison were left alone.

And could this be the stalwart country squire who strode about the grounds of Shadrington with a gun over his shoulder, proud of his fair acres—proud of the estate which had descended to him and to his father and grandfather before

him, free and unencumbered ; could this be the magistrate who had sat so long upon the bench, and who was known amongst his brethren for jovial good temper and kindness ; this tottering feeble man, whose hair had fallen off, and left but a scanty remnant of iron grey about the temples, where many lines were drawn ; this the kind father and indulgent husband, who now seldom spoke but to snarl at those about him, or piteously complain that he was sinking into his grave a ruined man—ruined by a set of rogues and cheats, whom he had not the power to bring to justice, though he had wasted more money for that end.

Surely this is not an exaggerated picture of miseries which of late have stalked abroad, in troops whose name is Legion, over the length and breadth of England, and laid a withering hand on the struggling clerk and mechanic, the thrifty shopkeeper, and the lonely widow, as well as on the landed proprietor and country gentleman, who, like Mr. Harrison, were tempted by florid prospectuses, and promises of an unheard-of rate of interest, to embark their floating capital, as they call it, in this treacherous sea of limited companies, which are unlimited in the ruin and agony of mind they bring upon their victims.

"Dear Uncle Robert," Agatha began, "don't please mind about me; I don't care in the least about my money; I am just as well without it as with it; and think how many years you were so kind to me, and treated me like a daughter."

"No, I didn't," was the answer. "If I did, I turned you out amongst strangers at a moment's notice. You know nothing about the value of money. Why don't they bring candles? This hotel life is the death of me. Better in England than abroad, however, with all their trumpery messes and nasty ways."

At this moment there was a rush along the passage, and the door opened to admit Beatrice and Victoria, who seized Agatha in an embrace which was not subdued by their long sojourn abroad; and the waiter coming in to light the gas, which hung from the ceiling, the cousins stood revealed to each other.

"You are not a bit altered," Victoria exclaimed, "except that you look somehow older and prettier."

"Look at me," said Beatrice. "Pray admire my wig, with all its puffs and frizzles, which mamma insists on being built up every morning. There! I have lost my glove out of my muff. What a bore! And it was a new pair."

"We have been to look at the house, papa. It will do, mamma thinks, though it is small. It is five guineas a week, however."

"Ridiculous! absurd!" growled Mr. Harrison, who had now got the "Standard" unfolded, and was greedily devouring the City Article. "Just like your absurd notions, with your father ruined!"

"Hush! dear Robert. Remember!" said a soft voice; and, all smiles of welcome, in the prettiest and most becoming dress, Mrs. Harrison put her arms round Agatha, and kissed her affectionately.

The old drawing back and feeling of distrust came over Agatha; but she wondered, as she stood under the chandelier, at Mrs. Harrison's youthful appearance, so free from any of the signs of disquiet and misery which were so unmistakable in her husband.

"Dearest," she began, "dinner is ordered at seven; but you shall not have much more of this hotel life. I have found a charming little nest that will do nicely for us, where I hope we shall see you, Agatha, very often. Your uncle is not very well; but Havensmouth will soon set him up. The perpetual change and bustle of a continental life did not suit him; but it will

be different here. The Cavendishes are very much pleased with Havensmouth, Eustace tells me. It will be so nice to meet them, and you have seen a great deal of them, I find, dear Agatha."

"Oh, yes," was the quiet answer. "But I must really go home now. Eustace, would you be so kind as to ask the waiter to send for a chair for me?"

"A midge? Yes, miss, immediately," said the little consequential man, who was bustling about the room, and attempting to clear the middle table for dinner. "Yes, miss, directly. There's a stand close by. We are very full to-night, ma'am," turning to Mrs. Harrison, "but to-morrow we shall be able to accommodate you with No. 37—a much better room; Lord and Lady Horley, and the Honourable Miss Lytes, came in not an hour before you did, and had engaged No. 37, and the suite of apartments on that floor."

The volubility of the waiter was not checked by the under-current of grumbling which Mr. Harrison kept up—the folly and extravagance of his wife and daughters, the wretchedness of the accommodation, the impossibility of their being able to afford to engage "Rosina," being the exciting cause just then.

"Isn't it dreadful?" Beatrice said, as she followed Agatha down the long passage of the hotel. "He goes on in that way continually. Oh, you can't think what a life we lead now. I wish you would come back and live with us, Agatha. Will you?"

"I don't know," Agatha said. "Mr. Harrison must ask me first."

"Oh! I dare say you are much happier at the Hopes'. Imagine Mr. Bruce having got a fortune, and we turned into your poor relations! Well, I shall ask mamma to-night point blank what she wishes; and as to poor papa, he would be thankful to have you again. Good-bye."

And then Agatha was put into the chair by Eustace, and went back to St. Mary's.

Mrs. Harrison had her own reasons for coming to Havensmouth for the winter. She knew perfectly well what she was doing; and although, when, that evening, the plan of Agatha's return to them was made the subject of family discussion, she appeared to look at it as a new idea requiring consideration, she had made up her mind that, as the wages of even one expensive maid were now felt as a burden, Agatha, with all her readiness to oblige, and her good taste in dress and cleverness with her fingers,

would be a useful appendage. Would she not always read the paper to Mr. Harrison? Would she not fill a convenient gap when the girls and herself wanted to amuse themselves in the day or in the evening? And as to the old fear about her darling son, that was to be met. An heiress would restore the fortunes of the family if the heir of Shadrington married one; and here was the beautiful Clara Cavendish close at hand. Agatha's intimacy with Susan would strengthen the chances of the two families being thrown a great deal together. And Eustace, even if he ever had had a passing fancy for his cousin, was far too worldly-wise to choose an up-hill career as a barrister, with the distant hope of inheriting the estate of his fathers—perhaps heavily encumbered—to a life of affluence and comfort with a wife who had family and position, as well as a large fortune with which to endow him.

All this passed through Mrs. Harrison's mind, and all this was carefully hidden from every eye. Eustace himself was as yet unconscious of the scheme; and, to speak the truth, he loved himself too much to be heartily in love with any woman. He liked and admired Agatha; she deferred to him; and her pleasure, when they met, was so unmistakable. But any serious thoughts for the

future had not entered his head; and the few angry words which had passed between him and his mother, when he found Agatha had been dispatched to Havensmouth without his knowledge, were the only token of any deeper feeling which even Mrs. Harrison could detect. When compared with such men as Frederick Henley, Eustace Harrison certainly shone; he was well read, and he could talk pleasantly and agreeably about what he read; he had taste in art, and could decide on the merits of a picture, and was really no mean artist himself; he was alive to the beauties of nature, and could versify his thoughts in what, at any rate, was very like poetry. But his finely-cut features always wore the same expression. The blue eyes were cold, and his voice, though well modulated and perfect in accent and tone, was the same whatever he spoke of, or whatever he read. There were no depths to be stirred, no storm-clouds and no flashes of lightning. Eustace was too thoroughly conscious of his own superiority, and too much occupied with himself, to be concerned about others beyond a certain point. Great griefs and great joys, throbs of intensest anguish and full tides of bliss, are alike unknown to natures such as his.

These are they who pass through the fire of trouble, apparently unscathed. But it is equally true that they also fall far short of the deeper joys which a loving Father will give his children to taste in their journey through the wilderness. The scale is more justly balanced than we in our ignorance may think. We sometimes pity those who perhaps need it not, and call them happy, who never know what true happiness means.

Thus it was that by a chain of circumstances linked together by a variety of causes, Agatha's path was again marked out for her; and the year she had spent at St. Mary's Farm was soon to be a thing of the past. A month after the morning of the shipwreck, and just as the new year had dawned, Agatha's big box was again filled with all her worldly possessions, and she stood ready to take up her abode once more with the Harrisons.

But she was to carry away with her a living remembrance of her life at St. Mary's. Louise Fontaine was to be maid, dressmaker, helper, nurse, anything in Mrs. Harrison's household, for a merely nominal salary.

"She wanted nothing," she said, "but to be near the dear young lady 'si douce et si bonne,'

and to be able sometimes to take flowers to her baby's grave." For the worn-out clothes of the ladies and for her board, she would have been content to serve, had not Mrs. Harrison generously offered her five pounds a-year as a little remuneration.

Letters of inquiry were written to Coutances by Mr. Bruce, and answered most satisfactorily. Louise's story was substantiated by the Roman Catholic curé of the village, where she had lived in her maiden days; and by the Protestant chaplain at St. Lo, who had known and respected her husband.

Louise was an orphan, and had married Leon Fontaine only two years before this time. He was superintendent of a salt mine, and met his death by falling from a shaft, just before her baby was born. Her uncle owned a small fishing-smack, trading between Jersey and Normandy, sometimes making longer cruises, from Jersey to the south coast of Devonshire, during the fishing season.

He had intended to put ashore at Havensmouth, with a vague promise to poor Louise that he had influence with some one he knew there, to get her employed by a fashionable milliner and dressmaker. But the chaplain seemed

to think the promise had been made more to rid himself of any future care of Louise and the child, to whom he stood as their only remaining relation, than with any definite idea of providing for her.

Fragments of the little smack were picked up from time to time in the cove and off St. Mary's Island, but the bodies of Jean Marçeau and his son were never found, and had doubtless been taken away by the forcé of the retreating tide, and washed ashore in some distant place, for no trace of them was ever discovered.

Mr. Bruce had found his cousin's widow most anxious to leave Glenbarrow at once, and she was soon to settle with her two little girls to Edinburgh, where she had many friends, and where life had more attractions for her than under the shadow of the Cheviots.

No one ever knew how generously the new Master of Glenbarrow treated the mother and her children. No one ever knew how the remembrance of past wrongs only made him more anxious to be liberal to her, who had brought a dark shadow over his young life.

Well might the lawyer, and the children's guardian and trustee, say to Mrs. Bruce, that few and rare were the instances of such liberality, and

unselfishness, and honour, as the heir of Mr. Nigel Bruce displayed, when he came into possession of his property. It was nothing very magnificent in the eyes of the world. An estate of a few hundred acres, an antique house, with thick grey walls and curious rounded pinnacles, somewhat after the fashion of a French chateau. A village inhabited mostly by the tenants on the estate, and a small Presbyterian church and manse.

There was very little neighbourhood in the thinly-populated border county, but Mr. Bruce took in at a glance how much work there was for him and for his sister. How many tumble-down dwellings to be repaired, how many neglected acres to be cultivated. Above all, the thought of having it in his power to do good amongst those where his lot was cast, and care for their spiritual as well as temporal welfare, animated and roused him.

Sometimes, indeed, when he and his sister were talking over the future, the thought would present itself, what if he had had the one dearest to him on earth to help him; what if there, amongst the poor of Glenbarrow, she had seen "her work" without and within, and had cheered and blessed him with her love, and

brightened him with the gladness of her fresh young life.

But he was not the man to sit idly brooding over vanished hopes, nor to let his disappointment make him selfish and moody. He bore this trial of his ripened manhood as he had learned to bear the somewhat similar one of his early years, and would secretly draw comparison between the two. In the one case he had trusted and been deceived. He had set up an idol, and it had crumbled into dust before him. Nothing but Christian charity and the earnest longing to forgive as he hoped to be forgiven, could have prevented bitterness and hatred from taking the place of a love which had been betrayed.

But now he had nothing but tender, happy memories, no thought of Agatha that was not gentle and sweet, no feeling but an earnest longing for her good, longings that often shaped themselves into prayer, that she might be guided safely by the Shepherd of the fold, into the way of peace.

St. Mary's Farm soon found a tenant, and by the middle of March the old inhabitants had taken flight northwards, and a troop of merry, healthy children played in the quadrangle, and the busy, industrious wife of the new farmer raised her

voice above the cackling of the live stock, as she tried to rule her own noisy brood.

It was a sweet April evening, a few days before Easter, when Agatha came down the familiar lane to the Pages' cottage. Her hands were full of primroses, and ivy, and fern, and as she walked along, she sang to herself in a low, soft voice. It was such a relief to get away from "Rosina" for a little while, to be beyond the reach of grumblings and repinings from her poor uncle, and to forget for a time that there was such a thing as money to be lost, and bills to be paid.

Certainly, as it seemed to Agatha, Mrs. Harrison's ideas of retrenchment and economy were curious. She dressed herself and her daughters as handsomely as ever, and with her usual tact and cleverness, had managed to get into society at Havensmouth, and caught at every possible party or amusement with eagerness. Her notions of economy seemed to consist in making a perfect drudge of Louise, and keeping her close at work, in modelling and remodelling old dresses, and making new ones, inwardly congratulating herself that for five pounds a year she had got what was really twice as useful to her as the departed maid had been at five-and-twenty

guineas, and all her extras found, which extras were not inconsiderable.

Then how conveniently Agatha had stepped into her place, how fond her uncle was of her, and she of him, and what a relief it was to have some one to stay with him when she, and Bee, and Victoria *must* be away from him.

This very day, an excursion with the Cavendishes had been planned to a castle, about fourteen miles from Havensmouth, and in spite of Susan's remonstrances, Agatha had preferred staying with him. She preferred it because she saw there was nothing else to be done, though as the two carriages-full drove off, and Walter looked up at the window where she stood, with his great dark eyes, and made a gesture of disapprobation, she felt rather inclined to cry.

It was likely to be a dull day to her—first a *tête-à-tête* luncheon with her uncle, then in the afternoon driving in his pony-chair for two hours, then reading to him the "Bullionist" and "Money Market Review" for the last week; and at last, after settling him for a nap before dinner, she might be free, perhaps, to follow her own devices.

Poor Mr. Harrison was getting weaker in body as well as in mind, the doctors began to hint at creeping paralysis, and to recommend

every possible nourishment, and every possible diversion. This had proved a particularly querulous day, and Agatha had sometimes nearly lost her patience; not quite, for there was something to her so piteous in the sight of that strong, prosperous man thus reduced to a pining invalid, that many were the expressions of vexation which died on her lips before they were uttered. At last, when Mr. Harrison had fallen asleep on the sofa, and she had drawn down the blind to keep out the dazzling western sunshine, she ran up to get ready for her walk. She looked in at Louise's little work-room as she passed.

"Venez, Louise," she said, "venez avec moi; je vais me promener."

"Ah non, mademoiselle, ce n'est pas possible. Regardez, tenez. J'ai toute cette robe à border avec cette ruche bleu. Il faut que je la finisse pour demain au soir."

Agatha saw Louise had been crying, and going kindly up to her she said, "Porterai-je des primevères au petit tombeau?" taking up some which lay on the table.

"Ah non, non merci," said the poor little mother, almost jealously, "je les porterai moi-même avant le déjeuner demain; je me leverai à cinq heures. Vous êtes très bonne, mais j'y vais

moi-même ;” then looking up with a flash of her dark eyes, she said, “ Pourquoi n’êtes-vous pas avec le reste de cette gaie compagnie aujourd’hui ? pourquoi restez-vous chez vous ?—Ah, ah ! c’est à cause de madame ; je n’aime pas madame !”

“ Je préfère rester avec mon oncle, Louise,” said Agatha, gravely ; “ si monsieur sonne, voulez-vous aller ?”

“ Oui, oui, mademoiselle ;” and then with a sudden and passionate gesture Louise seized Agatha’s hand and kissed it. “ J’ai lu le livre que Monsieur Bruce m’a donné ; ah ! c’est un bon livre ! Voilà un soulagement pour la veuve, et pour la mère désolée.”

Yes, there was comfort, there was the only true comfort ; and as Agatha walked down St. Mary’s Lane, her hands full of the treasures of the spring, she thought how true Louise’s words were. “ That book was the one which had guided so many a wanderer into safety and peace.” That book, which poor Louise was reading almost for the first time in her life, and drinking in hope and comfort from its sacred pages.

Agatha went into the cove, and then, after watching the waves breaking against the rocks for some minutes, she turned back to the Pages. Jessie was in her old place, busy at some work

which Agatha had provided for her, and on a little table by her side was the doll in the scarlet cloak, and a few books, which were amongst her greatest treasures.

"The lame young gentleman has been to see me again," Jessie said; "I was lifted into his carriage, and we went up the lane slowly, and we stopped under the trees by the farm, and he talked to me. How good he is; and when he speaks to me he says 'we,' and 'people like us, Jessie.' But I was afraid of the grand lady who came to meet the carriage, and asked who he had got there, in such a scornful way. I had only my sun-bonnet on, and that holland jacket you made me, Miss Agatha; but there was no one at home to dress me, and the footman lifted me into the carriage directly."

"I dare say Mr. Cavendish did not notice what you had on, Jessie, you are always neat and clean. Are not these primroses beautiful? shall I put them into that glass for you?"

"Oh yes, please, Miss Agatha. Mrs. Hope gave me that as a parting present, you know. Oh! how I miss them and you."

"I come as often as I can, Jessie; but it is a long walk from Rosina here, and I am a great deal with my uncle, Mr. Harrison, who is not well."

She went on arranging the flowers, when Jessie suddenly said—

“Miss Agatha, have you heard about Jim?”

“No, what about him?”

“Why he has been quite a different boy since the storm; he used to say dreadful bad words, and never went to church when he was ashore, and used to speak shameful to mother, but he is getting like Johnnie, more like Johnnie, I mean; and he says that he shall always remember how Mr. Bruce looked before they put off in the boat, and how he prayed for them all four that they might not go unprepared into another world. Somehow, Jim told me, he can't forget what Mr. Bruce said to him the afternoon before he started; and once or twice since when he was at the farm for a few days and Jim happened to be ashore again; and he says, Miss Agatha,” and Jessie's eyes first brightened and then got dim with tears, “that Mr. Bruce has been the saving of him from his bad ways, and that he don't believe he shall ever forget what he said about those great waves, and what it would have been if he had gone down with an oath on his lips. Mr. Bruce did good to everybody, it seems to me. On Sunday afternoons now the big boys who used to go to his

class—that is, two or three of them—read to the others, and Johnnie is trying to get the rough boys up at the farm to come too. Isn't it wonderful to think of? and Mr. Bruce never spoke a bit as if he were better than other people, and always had a cheerful word and a smile, and used to say such funny things to make us laugh."

Yes, it was all true; and as Agatha walked up the lane she thought that no one knew better than she did how true it was. She stopped at the wicket-gate, and a rough, curly-headed child stood just behind it peeping at her, with its fingers in its mouth. The grass had grown long again, and the forms of the beds could scarcely be seen. She thought she would venture to walk in and hoped no one would notice her. Those "narrowing nunnery walls" seemed to have a charm for her now. As she turned to retrace her steps, afraid of lingering near the windows, a gleam of western sun caught the arch above the wicket where the words were cut in their old, quaint characters, "*Dominus custodiat introitum tuum, et exitum tuum.*" As Agatha looked at them a prayer went up from the depths of her heart, that "God would lead her in the way she should go, and preserve her going out and coming in."

When she reached Rosina she found Eustace

had just arrived, and was sitting with his father. The party had not yet returned from their excursion, and Mr. Harrison grew impatient for his dinner.

“And you, Agatha, where have you been all this time? I have been so dull. I tried to walk up and down in the garden, but I hate such a confined space. I feel like a prisoner, and yet my legs are so weak they won’t carry me far. It is the effect of this relaxing climate, I believe, and we have got this house for a year. I really think I must have my dinner. Don’t dress, Eustace, don’t dress,” as he was leaving the room. “Ring the bell, Agatha, and order dinner. I can’t wait, it is not likely I should——”

But Eustace was gone, and Agatha had to amuse her uncle, till at last the dinner was announced by the pert house and parlour-maid, who divided the work of Rosina with the cook and Louise.

The party had not returned by eight o’clock, and Mr. Harrison was asleep in his chair, whilst Eustace walked up and down the verandah smoking his cigar. Presently he came in, and sitting down by Agatha said—

“Why are you not gone to this pic-nic?”

“Oh, I did not want to go particularly. Some one must stay with your father.”

"Yes, some one, but why should it always be you?"

"I don't know; he likes my reading better than Bee's or Victoria's; and besides, you know, Eustace, I should not stay here if I were not of use. I came here to do all I could to comfort Uncle Robert, and pay back, as far as I can, the debt of gratitude I owe him for all he gave me years ago."

"Nonsense, I shall speak to my mother about it. You look tired and not very well, Agatha."

She bent her head, and the colour came to her cheeks. Eustace was always so kind to her; of late, it had seemed that no one could ever think she was tired.

"There is a plan for the Cavendishes and our party to go to a ball Henley's regiment gives at Torminster on the twenty-fifth, just after Easter. I intend you to go too."

Agatha shook her head. "Oh, no, I never was at a ball, you know; the nearest approach to it was that party at the Cavendishes. I certainly shall not go even if I were asked, which I shall not be."

"You *shall* be asked, and, moreover, you will go. I shall settle that with Susan Cavendish. My mother will do anything they like; she has

a. perfect mania for the whole set, from that awful Aunt Cecilia downwards."

"A great many people don't think balls right, Eustace. I mean, they think dancing is too great an excitement, and that all the thought about dress and the late hours are bad for every one."

"You don't intend to take up with such cant, I hope? This comes of living with Presbyterian Puritans, and I think that lame boy Walter; who is always talking to you, has some such notions too. The grapes are sour to him, however, so his opinion does not go for much."

She looked up at him as he leaned on the table where she sat at work; but though her own voice and manner betrayed how much she was in earnest, the handsome face bent towards her did not change in the least as she said, "Eustace, I think we ought to try to do what we believe is right, and I don't call it cant to say what we think sometimes. Walter Cavendish told me that he was sure his sisters would be better without so much gaiety and dancing, and that it was a bad example for a clergyman's family to set others."

"The young prig," was the cool reply. "But, Agatha," he continued, nodding in the direction of the arm-chair, "things are looking

very badly there. I came down on purpose to talk to my mother about the real state of the case. The costs of that action are very large, and there are some calls on those abominable shares which my father will infallibly have to pay in June. How on earth the liabilities are to be met, I don't know; a good deal of land is sold, but Shadrington itself is entailed, and cannot be available. There will be such a drain on every possible source, that I don't see that much more than five or six hundred a year will be left, including the three hundred which is paid by the Fawcetts as rent for Shadrington."

And even as Eustace spoke the carriage-wheels were heard, and the whole party entered the room, tired, but full of mirth and merriment. Clara, with a heightened colour and unusual animation, looked more beautiful than Agatha had ever seen her; and poor Mr. Harrison awoke bewildered at the sight of so many guests, and began to murmur something about tea and coffee.

The greeting which Eustace received from his mother was enthusiastic as usual; but when every one was gone, and the house was quiet, a long conversation passed between the mother and the son which had its effect, and set Eustace's thoughts in a new direction; and so

cleverly did Mrs. Harrison develope her project that it seemed scarcely hers, but his, and appeared to strengthen more and more as he lay awake that night thinking it over. There might, indeed, be a way by which he could retrieve the fortunes of his family, and not run the risk of inheriting Shadrington with but a few hundreds a year to maintain its dignity and his own.

CHAPTER IX.

A TASTE OF THE DESIRED PLEASURE.

"For us, whatever's undergone
Thou knowest, willest what is done;
Grief may be joy misunderstood,
Only the good discerns the good;
I trust Thee while my days go on."

E. B. BROWNING.

EUSTACE stayed at Rosina for two or three days, and then returned to London, promising to meet his sisters at Torminster station, on the day of the ball. "You are to go, remember, Agatha," he had said in parting; "that is a settled point." And as days went on, the ball became the grand subject of conversation between the two families. Agatha got tired of the sound of tarletan, and white silk, and flowers, and wreaths, and finery. Easter fell very late, nearly at its latest possible date, and the ball was to come off on the Thursday in Easter week. A curious mingling, it seemed to Agatha, of the

Church and the world, as all through Holy week her cousins and the Cavendishes attended service twice daily, and the intervals were filled up with discussions as to the relative merits of pink and blue, violet wreaths and lilies.

If, as Enstace had said, Agatha's going to Torminster for the ball was a settled point, it was strange that her aunt did not mention the subject to her; but the mystery was explained two days before the twenty-fifth, when Susan sent Agatha a pencil note, begging her to come up to the Firs that afternoon at five o'clock, and *alone*, as she had something particular to say to her. When she arrived, she found Walter in the drawing-room; his face brightened when she came in, and he made her sit down by him, to have, as he said, "a good talk."

"The time for our going back to Northborough is nearly come," he was saying. "I shall miss you very much, Agatha."

"And I shall miss you. Rosina is taken for a year, and sometimes, I think, Walter, my uncle will never leave it; he gets weaker, I am certain."

"You are very much tied with him, I expect, Agatha. Do you read to him?"

"Yes, oh yes; but it is all about money, and

those long dreary articles in the papers about per cents. and interest. But on Easter-Day, I thought I should like to tell you, I picked up courage to ask him if I should read the lessons and psalms for the day to him. He said, 'Yes, if they were not too long;' and he seemed to like it, though, Walter, I had to read a newspaper afterwards."

"That's right, Agatha, you have made a good beginning, and it is brave of you. Get out of the newspapers of a Sunday, though, if you can; there's nothing like making a *firm* stand."

"I know that," and she hesitated. "I think, Walter, I *am* beginning to get on a very little—it isn't much, but still I do think it is a little. Living as we do now, shows me better than anything would have done, I think, how all the things people care for most in the world crumble away, and disappoint instead of satisfying. Oh, Walter, there is nothing else talked of but this money loss by my poor uncle, and my aunt is trying to indulge in everything she likes, such as dress, and going to this ball, for instance, and pinches and screws in small things."

"Humph! the ball. Fred Henley was here yesterday, and I had a pretty strong dose of it

myself. By the by, Agatha, do you like Eustace Harrison?"

A rosy blush spread over her face as she said—

"Yes, I do very much, he is always so kind to me."

Walter looked at her earnestly, and seemed about to say something, but checked himself.

"Fred Henley was repeating some of his pleasant opinions of me yesterday, about sour grapes and so on; but then, that chatterbox must talk, and must make mischief. Well, Susie, what's in the wind now?" as Susan came in.

"I want you to come upstairs, Agatha," said Susan, "I have something to show you."

In Susan's room stood Clara, and the maid, and little Laura, all on the tip-toe of expectation.

"You are going to the ball, you know."

"No, I don't know it," said Agatha; "I think I am going to stay at home."

"Do you? Now please to unbutton your jacket, and be so condescending as to take off your dress, and try how you look in this pink and white tulle, and the wreath of crystals, moss rose-buds, and so forth. To take away any scruple you may feel about it, I will tell you the dress was made for me in London, and was six inches too

short, and, moreover, made my yellow complexion and hair appear to some disadvantage. So I have had it altered for 'la petite Agatha,' as your poor little Louise would say, and you are to come with us to the Torminster ball in it, wreath and all. Now then."

Agatha looked at the pretty dress, so exactly appropriate to her in every way, so exactly what, a year or two ago, she would have delighted in, and then at the kind beaming face which looked down upon her, but she drew back."

"Oh, no, Susan; besides, Aunt Anna will not be pleased, and I am quite sure Miss Battiscombe will not like me to have it."

"Miss Battiscombe has no right to interfere. If I say I will not wear a dress that does not suit me, what business is it of hers?"

"Oh, you must really have it," said Clara. "You'll vex Susan so if you don't."

And Laura echoed the same strain.

At last, fearing to seem ungracious, Agatha consented to be arrayed in the ethereal pink and white cloud, and a natural girlish expression of "How *very* pretty it is," rewarded Susan.

"Of course it is on you; but I look ten times better in the white crape, with forget-me-nots, which Clara has presented to me. So we are all

obliged to each other, for Annt Cecilia gave Clara her dress, which will cast both yours and mine into the shade."

Agatha stood opposite the tall mirror, holding a secret debate with herself. Should she go to this ball, or should she make the firm stand Walter had spoken of, or should she yield to a desire she could not help feeling she had, to join that merry party to Torminster, so full of pleasant anticipations as it was of seeing the cathedral, and of being lionized by Eustace through the quaint old streets. Then came the thought, *why* should she be obliged to Susan Cavendish for this dress, when she was so unwilling to be dependent on any one else, and had so resolutely withstood all gifts from others? The scale seemed nearly balanced, but Susan's next words turned it.

"We shall all be so disappointed if you don't go with us; and I promised Mr. Harrison, your cousin, I mean, that I would do my best to bring you. He knows about the dress, too, and said pink always suited you. Come, you are standing as if you were in a tableau. I am pleased to see you are so enchanted with the dress that you don't know how to take it off again."

Then Agatha's decision was made.

“Thank you so much, Susan ; I will go, that is, if Aunt Anna will let me, and if I can leave Uncle Robert.”

“Of course you can ; some one else must stay with him. It is a shame how they turn you into a nurse ; you want change, and this will do you good. And we shall be gone in another month,” she said, kissing Agatha affectionately, as she helped her to take off the pretty wreath, with its hanging ferns and crystal dew-drops.

Then the two girls went on to talk of the rooms at the hotel in Torminster, which Captain Henley had engaged. They were to go by an early train on the day of the ball, and have time to look about Torminster. And Agatha felt her interest increasing in the preparations in which she was now personally concerned. Her head was as full of the novelty of the scene into which she was to be introduced as a head over which scarcely nineteen years had passed was likely to be. And as she walked home, one little secret cause of joy was certainly uppermost. Eustace wished her to go ; said so not only to her, but to the Cavendishes ; and had even been pleased and interested about the dress in which Agatha had agreeable visions of herself as she walked towards Rosina. It was a lovely evening, and the sea lay calm and blue

under a cloudless sky ; the birds in the shrubberies which enclosed the different villas were singing their vesper hymn, and Agatha felt ready to join the chorus. At the gate of Rosina she met a boy in a page's tight-buttoned dress. She knew him as belonging to the Bromfields' establishment. He held the gate for her to pass, and touched his cap.

"How is Mrs. Bromfield to-day?" she asked.

"Please, ma'am, I've just left a note for you ; Mrs. Bromfield is dead."

The words fell as a chill amidst all the thoughts of pink tulle, and decorations, and pleasure, which had been filling Agatha's mind. She did not say a word, but went on towards the house, and taking the little note from the table in the entrance hall, ran up to her own room with it.

Margaret had been so much devoted to her mother for many weeks that Agatha had seen but little of her ; but the few words traced hastily in pencil, seemed to tell of the utter exhaustion and weariness of the writer, of utter desolation too, now the object of so much care was gone, and needed it no more. And Agatha's heart was full of sympathy. She was struck forcibly then, as we all must be struck sometimes,

by the strange mingling before our very eyes of joy and sorrow, life and death, even in that small circle in which we move, as *one* in this strange and shifting world. We go on in our own way, and laugh, and talk, and meet others we know, and speak of countless indifferent things, and amongst them, perhaps, we exchange remarks of pity or surprise about the death of a near neighbour or acquaintance. Only a week ago, perhaps—perhaps not so long—those we speak of were amongst us. We saw them at church, we met them at dinner, we talked to them in the streets, or in a shop, and now they are gone. But in most cases no deeper feeling is stirred, so true it is that the waters close over the dead, and their place knoweth them no more. And we scarcely think, or find it hard to realize, that so it will be with each one of us individually. The angel of death shall descend on our own homes, and darken it with a solemn shadow, with which the world beyond has nothing to do.

Instead of showing any great dissatisfaction that Agatha was to join the party to Torminster, to her great surprise Mrs. Harrison said she was glad Susan Cavendish had made the way so easy, for much as she wished dear Agatha to have

the pleasure, she could not have afforded to give her the necessary dress. The only thing was about leaving Mr. Harrison. But the next day Beatrice had a severe attack of cold, which swelled her face, and made it impossible for her to think of the ball. Indeed, when the morning came, she was unable to raise her heavy head from her pillow, and her mother issued the decree that, after all, dear Agatha must stay at home. Louise, who had worked hard for days before at the ladies' dresses, which had been made on the principle of the strictest economy at home—and had ransacked fashion-books, and pinned and repinned patterns with wonderful patience, was very unhappy at the idea of Agatha being disappointed. However, Susan and Clara came early to Rosina to see if the Harrisons were likely to be in time to get off by the one o'clock train, and they were both so very determined that anyhow Agatha must go, that Mrs. Harrison suddenly changed her mind, and said of course she should stay with dear Bee; indeed she could not be happy to leave her.

So it was finally arranged, and Miss Battiscombe was gracious, and undertook to chaperone the four girls with as good a grace as could be expected of her; and all went smoothly on the

drive to the station, and in the railway carriage to Torminster, where, on the wide platform, Eustace Harrison and Captain Henley stood as the train came up, and escorted the whole party to the hotel looking over the cathedral green, to the west front of the church, not yet hidden by the young leaves of the lime-trees which stood in a row before the windows of the sitting-room, and in summer shut out the view of the grand arched doorway and richly-carved figures standing in niches above it.

A public ball, especially when it is given by those who know what goes to make decoration telling and effective, is undoubtedly a brilliant sight, and the officers of Captain Henley's regiment had certainly spared neither pains nor money to make their ball a grand success.

To Agatha's unsophisticated eyes it was like fairy land. She was dazzled and bewildered, and when Miss Battiscombe marshalled her charge into the room at the Town Hall of Torminster, at the door of which the officers stood, in the blaze of full-dress uniform, to receive their guests, and offer elegantly-printed cards, with little silver-tipped pencils hanging to them by white cord, Agatha felt a strong desire to retreat down the stairs again and hide herself

in some obscure corner. Eustace's prettily-expressed admiration of her appearance in the sitting-room of the hotel had pleased her, and the beautiful bouquet of flowers she held was his present; but now she seemed to lose her identity in that gay crowd, which thickened every moment, and was thankful to take refuge on a bench at the side of the room, near a stout lady and her daughter, whom Miss Battiscombe had greeted with one of her coldest and most chilling bows, when she had risen to seize her hand with great empressement.

One after the other her companions were carried off, and were lost in the mazes of the dance, and when Captain Henley came threading his way through the crowd to ask her to dance with him, she felt almost sorry to leave her asylum. He had evidently asked Agatha as a matter of duty, instigated thereto by one of his cousins, and she was never able to endure his small ripple of silly talk patiently; it always had the effect of making her dull. Indeed, if *this* was pleasure—if this was the grand end and aim of life, Agatha began to think, to take no higher ground, as many others have thought, balls were a great mistake.

There came a gleam of brightness, however,

when Eustace took her off for a quadrille, and looking at his card when it was over, said she must give him another towards the close of the evening.

“You don’t use your pencil at all, Agatha; look at your list, and tell me if you are free.”

“Of course I am. Oh, Eustace! I am getting so tired of it,” she said. “How much longer shall we have to stay?”

“Till daylight, to a dead certainty,” was his reply; “but you must not be dull. Victoria is enjoying herself, and I don’t see why you should not also; and as to the Cavendishes and Miss Battiscombe, they are in their glory. I will bring some one soon to dance with you,” he said, as he took her back to Miss Battiscombe’s neighbourhood, “but meanwhile stick to ‘Aunt Cecilia,’ and then you will at any rate hear something amusing. Now I must go. I am to dance this waltz with Clara Cavendish. Miss Battiscombe,” he said, “I have brought my cousin, Agatha, to your protection again. I found her wedged up in a corner, where she could not see or be seen,” and with a kind smile he left her.

The position at the top of the room was much better for seeing what was going on, and Agatha began to forget herself and her shy feelings, and

to enter into all that was passing around her. Miss Battiscombe had not deigned to notice Eustace Harrison's remark, and a feeling of wonder came over Agatha, as she heard this usually dignified, and most high and mighty lady, talking a great deal of nonsense about the lace on his coat to one of the gay officers, and joking and laughing like a fast girl of eighteen.

But it is not necessary for us to enter into further details of this ball. Could its story have been written out, it would have been curious to notice how very very few were happy in that gaily-decorated room, where all had come certainly to be happy, or to think themselves so.

There was the usual distinction between the townspeople of Torminster and the people of the county, who kept aloof, and looked with blank amazement when those whom they had no objection to talk to when exchanging a call, or even when meeting in the street, ventured to approach them with a friendly greeting *here*. So there were many feelings of injured pride from this cause; then there were mothers, who had strained every nerve to get one of the fine cards of invitation, standing disconsolate with daughters who had no introductions, and scarcely danced the whole evening; there were rivalries

and dissatisfactions; there were disappointments and vexations. Little meek women, who were pleased to find themselves there with their husbands or daughters, were discomforted by the passing remark of an amiable acquaintance that these crowded rooms of mixed society were not enjoyable; that a private dance, like one Lady Morton had given the night before, was so much pleasanter.

Then there were many who had run into expenses they could ill afford to come to this ball, or bring their daughters to it. The ghost of unpaid bills rose up to distract many who were arrayed in the most fashionable dresses, and who looked outwardly smiling and pleased.

Eustace Harrison claimed the second promised dance with Agatha, and he seemed abstracted and thoughtful. He had noticed—he could not fail to notice—how her face changed when he came near her, and how she kindled with animation and delight as he bent down to talk to her.

“Under other circumstances,” he said to himself, “it might have been different—it *would* have been different; but now——” and as he came to this point, Clara Cavendish glided past him on the arm of a short, ill-favoured nobleman,

who had been paying her great attention all the evening. "He must not delay," he thought; "the die must be cast. He was not afraid of Henley for a rival, but a viscount's coronet was another matter."

When the quadrille was over, he led Agatha into one of the rooms fitted up with all the elegances of a drawing-room, and sat down by her on a crimson-covered ottoman. She thought he was unusually silent, but she was content to be with him whether he talked or not. Presently he said,

"I wish I could think you had enjoyed your first ball more, Agatha; but you will soon get into the swing of it, and the next will be a very different affair."

"I don't think there will ever be a *next*," she said; "I mean I don't believe I should ever care for this kind of society."

"Nonsense, I know no one who will enjoy it more. You have been too much shut up of late. You think too much of others, Agatha, and not enough of yourself."

"Oh, no, it is not that," she said, with a soft, almost sad, glance; "but I thank you very much, Eustace, for bringing me."

"We will go over the cathedral to-morrow,

or to-day, more properly speaking," he said; "and to the afternoon service, perhaps."

"Oh, thank you," she said, brightening.

"They don't talk of leaving Torminster till the five o'clock train. Most of them will be in bed till one o'clock, I dare say. Now it is time I went in for it again; there is the band striking up, and that waltz is my last dance with Clara." He rose with a sort of half sigh; "Let me take you back to Miss Battiscombe again."

"Might I stay here?" glancing round at the few worn-out and weary old ladies who were yawning on the sofas and ottomans. "Might I stay here, it is so quiet?"

"Yes; I will come for you when we are really going. It is nearly four o'clock, I see. Remember to-morrow we will go to lionize the cathedral together."

Then he was gone, and Agatha was left to her own thoughts till she was roused by a summons to the cloak-room.

The sweet, soft April morning was dawning in all its beauty, when the carriage rolled along the Torminster streets, and at length deposited the tired party at the door of the hotel. The freshness of early day was still unsullied by the smoke of the city, and the cathedral stood clearly

defined against the bright blue sky, the smooth square of grass outstretched before it, and the tiny leaves on the lime-trees quivering as the gentle breeze stirred them.

Victoria and Agatha shared the same room at the very top of the hotel, and long after Victoria had gone to sleep, Agatha sat by the window watching the passers-by become more and more numerous, and looking at the grand old church, standing grey and solemn in the morning light, till she learned it by heart.

About half-past eight Miss Battiscombe's maid was so condescending as to bring a cup of tea, which Victoria was too sound asleep to heed, but which Agatha found very refreshing. "Miss Cavendish begged me to say she was not going to rise till eleven, and you were not to hasten, Miss Moore," she said.

But it seemed to Agatha so utterly incongruous to settle off to sleep at such a time and on such a morning, that she dressed herself by slow degrees, and, having put away all the finery into the large box which held it, she went downstairs and out into the cathedral green. The bell was chiming for the ten o'clock service, and, as she went into the nave, it ceased, and the organ pealed out the voluntary while the choristers and clergy

filed into the choir. The vergers held back the curtain which hung over the door for a moment, expecting Agatha would pass in; but she sat down on a seat in the nave, and remained outside, scarcely feeling courage to go into the choir alone.

As the service went on, the words of which she could distinctly hear, it seemed to lay a hand of peace upon her soul. All the bustle and gaiety of the last few days, with the fatigue, and, as she was obliged to confess to herself, the disappointment of last night, had worn and wearied her; and now, in the outer court of the temple, as that glorious hymn of praise ascended to God by which generations of men have lauded and magnified His Holy name, poor little Agatha's heart, earthward bent as it had so long been, seemed to rise with the noble strain. As she listened to the second lesson for the day, which told, in St. Paul's own words, the wonderful story of his conversion, the words struck her, "I am Jesus; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Yes, she had found it hard, but the Shepherd does not wait till the wandering sheep find Him. Thanks be to God, He calls them by name, and they hear his voice and follow Him.

Long after the congregation had dispersed—and it was a very small one—Agatha sat still in the same place, and, not till the verger bustled up and asked if she wished to see over the cathedral, did she rouse herself to leave the church.

“No, thank you; I am coming again in the afternoon,” she said to the man, and then she hastened back to the hotel.

No one but Susan was in the sitting-room, where the breakfast was waiting, and, when Agatha went in with her hat on, she exclaimed, “Why, Agatha, I thought you were sound asleep.”

“Oh, I could not go to sleep with the sunshine streaming in at the window. Is anybody up yet?”

“No; and so you and I can talk over our news. I have seen, however, how the tide was turning for a long time, so I am not surprised. Clara is going to marry Eustace Harrison; she says he proposed to her last night, when they danced their last dance. She thinks his love perfectly disinterested, of course, and he protests it is, but I can see a little more clearly. His lady mother did not come to Havensmouth for nothing. Papa has to be consulted, of course, but I don't think he will make any great opposi-

tion. Clara stands in a very different position to any of us, and has a right to endow whom she pleases with herself and her fortune. Mamma won't like it so well as if it had been that handsome little lord who has been so attentive lately; but she will get over it. Shadrington is a nice place, and near us. So this is the end of the ball. Poor Freddie Henley, I fear he will receive rather a shock."

While Susan spoke Agatha had not moved, but stood by the window, half screened by the large-patterned chintz curtain from observation.

"I must go to call Victoria, I think," she said, still keeping her face turned from Susan, "or she will be later than any one. I hope Clara will be happy;" and, before Susan had time to rejoin, she was gone. To be alone, only for five minutes, to rally her forces, and to hide from every eye what she felt, this was her strongest wish just then. She stopped on the stairs, and pressed her hands over her face, while a thrill of pain shot through her young heart, which was not the less sharp because the cause of it was unworthy. "No one will know it—no one shall know it," she said, half-aloud half to herself, "and I shall get on very well." Then the proud self-reliance of her nature gave way, and the

next moment she found herself seeking a help better than her own, and intreating that He would comfort her, and show her His will, and bend *hers* to *His*.

There are many castles in the air ; there are many fair visions which, as they fall and fade, give throbs of keenest pain. Even in after years, when we look back on such visions, and *feel* how mistaken we were, and *know* how little happiness would have been ours had they endured instead of vanishing, and can be thankful that we were not allowed to see them realized—even then we can pity and feel for ourselves, as we stood in the freshness of our early days, when the cloud land disappeared, with all its rosy tints and glowing beauty, and we found ourselves standing gazing on a blank and a void, which, to our young eyes might, perchance, look like a long and cheerless waste, stretching out indefinitely for the remainder of our lives. In most cases the cheerless waste and the glorious vision are alike a mirage ; but we only learn that it is so afterwards, as, little by little, step by step, we come out of the dreams of youth into the graver realities and intenser joys and sorrows of this transitory world.

So let us judge Agatha gently, and with

kindly sympathy, as she joined the rest of the party at breakfast, and, with a smile on her lips, and a dull aching at her heart, saw Eustace and Clara Cavendish meet, and heard the little half jesting speeches which passed about them. They themselves were very collected and calm, showing neither embarrassment nor confusion. Both faces, remarkable for regularity of features and fresh, fair colouring, looked the same as they ever did, and they sauntered out to see the cathedral, and walk through some of the curious narrow streets of Torminster, a little ahead of the rest of the party, but neither of them betraying by their manner that anything especial had transpired between them.

Perhaps some uneasy thoughts had intruded themselves on Eustace's mind before he had seen Agatha, but they were quite dispersed when, as Clara and Miss Battiscombe went into a shop near the cathedral, he joined Agatha, and said, "Let us wait here for them. I suppose you have heard that fortune has turned her wheel in my favour at last."

"Yes," she said, in her usual voice; "and I am very glad that it has proved so. I hope you will be very happy, Eustace."

"Then no harm is done here," was the inward

rejoinder, "that is one comfort," while aloud he said, "Thanks; you see it was incumbent on me to do something to rescue the sinking ship—in other words, to look out for a shorter and pleasanter way to affluence than the very doubtful prospect of that seat on the Woolsack which I once mentioned to you." The voice was cold, and there was a slight touch of bitterness in the tone. "However, the royal assent has not yet passed," he continued. "I have to write to Mr. Cavendish by to-day's post, and to the Honourable lady, Clara's mother; but, as I have Miss Battiscombe on my side, I don't think I have much to fear. I am afraid poor Henley will be rather crestfallen. You remember our conversation about him?"

Yes, Agatha remembered it very well, and the contemptuous reference to the "money bags" which Eustace had then made.

"I hope, Agatha, we shall always be friends," he said, in somewhat an altered voice; "and I hope you and Clara will be friends too; they are all immensely fond of you as it is."

There was not time for more, for the others now came towards them—Captain Henley added to the number; he certainly looked neither crestfallen nor miserable, and was full of the

glory with which the ball last night was universally allowed to have passed off.

Talking on their light foolish talk to the door of the choir, as if the nave were not the church at all, the whole party entered, and followed the verger through the building, hearing the story he told of the various monuments and chapels, the carving and the windows, with exemplary patience, and with an abstracted air, like a child saying a lesson, parrot fashion, and attaching no meaning to the words.

Then they were all shown into seats, and the evening service began. This time Agatha was one with the worshippers, not only in spirit but in presence. Like a message from the past the words of the Psalms for the twenty-ninth evening of the month fell on her ear, calling to mind the bodily pain she had suffered, as she was carried to the farm by those strong arms under the blue sky of the summer night, and had pleaded for something to be repeated to her, which would help her to forget the pain.

Now again the petition seemed quite suited to her case, far more suited than then. Her spirit waxed faint then as now, but not then could she so earnestly say that her soul gasped unto God, as a thirsty land. Not then as now

did she pray, "Teach me to do the thing which pleaseth Thee, for Thou art my God. Let thy loving spirit lead me forth into the land of righteousness." Not then as now could she say, with a humiliating sense of her own unworthiness, "I am thy servant."

As the train bore her back to Havensmouth that night, a new light seemed to have dawned upon her soul. Tired, and worn, and weary she might be in body and mind, but deep within lay the secret sense that if she showed Him her trouble, He would teach her to bear it, and lead her by it to rest and peace, which the world could never give.

Beatrice's cold, Mrs. Harrison's disappointment in having to stay at home, all was forgotten in the joyful intelligence which Eustace himself communicated to his mother. Agatha had never been so rapturously embraced, nor had had so many kind words said to her as on that evening. Even poor Mr. Harrison seemed to wake up into something of his former self, and was brighter and more interested in what was passing than he had been for a long time.

Two or three days of anxiety passed, till Mr. and Mrs. Cavendish's mind was made known; but the conclusion was a satisfactory one, though

Mrs. Cavendish's letter was somewhat cold in its expression. But, on the whole, the course of love ran smoothly, and with nothing to interrupt its serenity.

Mr. and Mrs. Cavendish came to Havensmouth for the last week of their children's eight months' residence at the Firs, and were so well pleased at the great improvement in Walter's general health, and in the complete disappearance of Laura's cough, that they talked of taking the house again for the ensuing winter.

"They talk of it," said Walter, when Agatha was sitting with him for the last time, "but I doubt if it will come to more than talk; and as I am so much better, I think my father and mother ought not to spend so much for my sake. It used to be such a puzzle to me to find out why it was, so much money was spent on me for doctors, who all say the same thing, and to gratify all my hundred and one whims, and I, a useless log, lying still all day, neither good for use nor ornament. Many is the time, Agatha, when I have gnashed my teeth about it; and when I was so cross no one could endure to be near me, it was this thought that often made me so. But those days are over, thank God," he said, reverently; "I may have something to do

for Him, though I lie here year after year. I am sorry to lose you," he said, putting his white, transparent hand out towards Agatha. "From the first moment that Aunt Cecilia snubbed you, and Susan brought you into this room, I thought we should be friends, and I hope you will write to me sometimes."

"Indeed, I will," said Agatha. "I shall feel very forlorn when you are gone. Is it not strange how I am tossed about like a ball, from one to another, and seem to have no settled resting-place. Still I think I have my business in life now, and that makes me happy."

"Of course it does," he said. "This marriage continues to give great satisfaction, I suppose," he said, after a pause. It was the first time he had mentioned it to Agatha.

Instinctively she felt why, and that Walter had, with his quick, penetrating glance, divined her secret. The colour rushed to her face, and the tears to her eyes, but she did not speak. She bent her head upon the hand she held—the small, white, almost childish hand—and poor Walter pressed his lips upon her hair.

The next word was "Good-bye," in low, soft tones, twice repeated, and so she left him. The impulsive sympathy of that invalid boy had been

so sweet, and touched a chord in her heart which would henceforth always respond to the very sound of his name.

She walked slowly home towards Rosina, and was greeted by a long roll of paper, with a good many stamps upon it, addressed to her in a hand she knew well. A letter lay beside it, and she took them both up to her room.

So many things had happened since she had re-written and altered the manuscript according to Mr. Bruce's advice, that she had almost forgotten it, certainly not the most distant hope of seeing it in print had crossed her mind. She remembered giving it into Mr. Bruce's hands during one of his short visits to St. Mary's before his final departure to Glenbarrow, when not a word beyond the commonplaces of life had passed between them. Now, as she unrolled the lined paper, to her surprise and joy a few printed sheets dropped out.

What could it mean? Had the publisher only printed some of the story, and thought it was not worth while to continue it? Mr. Bruce's letter, which she now opened, explained it:—

“DEAR AGATHA,” it began—“I am very glad to send you the first proofs of your story, which

I received to-day, with a letter from the publisher, which preceded them a fortnight ago, expressing his willingness to offer you twenty-five pounds for the copyright. Will you correct the sheets, and let Mr. Halstead have them as soon as you can? He will then enter into direct communication with you, and continue to send you more as they are printed. I hope this will prove but the beginning of a successful career.

“Mrs. Hope is quite well, and so is your old friend Shag. He seems to have increased in strength since he came to the northern country, where the spring is now in full beauty. Shag took a flying leap to-day, which seemed to amaze the two little terriers I found here greatly.—
Always truly yours, “ROLAND BRUCE.”

Poor Agatha! She read the letter again and again, and looked at the two figures in the publisher's letter many times before she could persuade herself that it was not a dream. To her it seemed a mine of wealth, and more than enough to make her independent for a year at least. And the longed-for independence seemed so sweet, especially as she had earned it by that little tale which it had given her so much solace and pleasure to weave.

“God is very good to me,” was her exclamation at last; “now I shall be able to help Louise to put that little cross by her baby’s grave. Poor Louise! I must tell her. I feel as if no one else would care about it now—no one else.”

CHAPTER X.

AT LAST.

“Now I see thee what thou art,
Thou art the highest and most human too.”

TENNYSON.

THE sunshine of a bright January afternoon was slanting in at the drawing-room window of Rosina, and lighting up the masses of soft brown hair, drawn back from a pale serene face which we knew well three years before. The sun seemed to make a special brightness round that small head, bending over an open book which rested on Agatha Moore's knees, as she sat in a low chair by Mr. Harrison's sofa. She was reading in a soft, musical voice from the Bible the lesson for the day, and every now and then the lips of the sick man moved as if in prayer, as the words fell upon his ear.

“Thank you, my dear; thank you,” he said, as she finished; “I am getting much weaker,

Agatha; I don't think my days will be many. Have you not seen a change in me of late?"

"Yes, dear Uncle Robert; I don't think you are so strong as you were a month or two ago; but Dr. Hastings says——"

"I don't want Dr. Hastings' opinion," he said, interrupting her with something of his old irritability; "I have had two decided strokes of paralysis, and I think a third is near; no one outlives a third. My dear, it would be as well if you told your aunt I am worse, I think, though I don't like to hurry her back from Shadrington —Shadrington that I shall never see again, though I dream of it so often. Do you know, Agatha, it seems a very little while since I was a young fellow there, going out with Cox the gamekeeper, with a gun over my shoulder, and so proud if I brought down a pheasant. Then there's a hollow on the Northborough side of the park, where I got a bad fall when I was a little lad, and lay like a stone at the bottom. When I came to myself I couldn't move, and I remember how I lay staring up at a great bunch of primroses at the root of a tree on the bank. I dream I am lying there now sometimes, and almost expect to see my poor mother come rushing down the bank, with two or three people

at her heels, all looking for me. Ah! I am bound hand and foot now, and I shall never get loose any more. It's odd how I live in those days, isn't it? I hear the bells chiming for church, and see myself trotting off by my mother's side. She was a good mother, and she died when she was still young. It is a puzzling thought that of meeting her in heaven. I, a poor worn out old man, that she left a chubby boy of ten years old."

So he would wander back into the past very often now. There was no more mourning for lost money and faded hopes—no more feverish longings for newspaper opinions on shares and companies; these were all lulled to rest, and to Agatha had been given the blessed office of ministering to this simple trusting nature, and leading it, as a child is led, to the Fountain whence flows the well of water to cleanse, and sanctify, and save.

"My dear," he said presently, "you have been a great comfort to me; may God bless you. If it had not been for you, I might never have had my thoughts turned from my trouble to Jesus. You have been very patient, Agatha, and good. Eustace has my express orders to see that you are provided for. What little there is—there isn't much besides Shadrington and Anna's

settlement now—is to be divided between you and the two girls. Just read me a hymn, will you, and then I think I shall go to sleep.”

Agatha obeyed. She did not need to read his favourite hymns, she had said them so often, that she knew them by heart. “I was wandering and weary,” was one of the great favourites, and “Sweet Saviour, bless us ere we go.” This afternoon, when she had repeated the last words—

“Through life’s long day, and death’s dark night,
O gentle Jesus be our light,”

Mr. Harrison was asleep. For a few minutes she sat watching him, and thinking over what he had just said, with tears of thankful happiness in her eyes. She had wanted work in her restless, unsatisfied days, and she had found it where she least expected. But first, had not the dear Lord led her by the hand, and shown her the thing which pleased Him; had He not laid his hand on her, and given her what she had asked—power to fight against her own sins and infirmities—grace to turn to Him for forgiveness and daily renewing of her strength. When she thought of herself as she was when she sat in the chair by the fire at St. Mary’s Farm that gloomy Sunday, which was so long and dreary, she smiled at the

contrast between then and now; and as she smiled, she remembered who had first spoken plainly to her, and in answer to her restless discontent had said, "Perhaps I can tell you what you do want." Occasionally a letter from Mrs. Hope during those three years had broken the silence between them. But her letters were simple details of their busy life—busier now than ever; of schools built and tenantry looked after; huts turned into cottages, waste acres reclaimed, low land drained, and high land enriched and fertilized. Mrs. Hope wrote all this, but they were bare details only; sometimes putting in a word, to the effect that Roland was well and strong; Elspeth getting into years, but having no need to exert herself now, and Philip living in a nice cottage of his own, as bailiff and general overlooker of Glenbarrow.

But with the exception of the letter which had accompanied the proof sheets of her first story, Agatha had heard only once from Roland himself, and then it was a short acknowledgment of another little book she had written, a copy of which she sent him. She had been almost sorry she had done so, the reply was so cold and short. She could not know how hard had been the struggle to restrain an expression of what he

had felt, as he read what was so evidently a story of her own thoughts and feelings, so evident especially to him who knew her as no one else did, and who had watched her so closely for so many months, with eyes quickened by the love, which he had truly called enduring.

Agatha was roused from her musing by the quick opening of the door, as Beatrice came in.

"Hush! dear Beatrice!" she said, "take care, you will wake him!"

Beatrice paused. "I can sit with papa now, Agatha, and you must go out, it is so fine; here is a letter from mamma. They are all having a glorious time of it at Shadrington. Eustace and Clara know how to entertain people, it seems; and the house is full. Clara looked beautiful at the dinner they gave on the 12th; read it yourself, if you like."

Agatha took the letter, and then said, gently, "Beatrice, I think Uncle Robert has been much weaker the last few days; he wishes your mother should be told so. Will you write to her?"

"What do you mean?" said Beatrice, with a frightened glance at her father; "you don't think——"

"I think he is perceptibly weaker, and your mother must not be kept in ignorance of it. She

will reproach us afterwards if we do not tell her the truth."

Beatrice, who was very fond of her father, though ministering to him as an invalid of years' standing was not in either her own or her sister's line, stood gazing at him with a distressed face. Afterwards, she repeated, "Agatha, you don't think he will die soon?"

"I cannot tell, Beatrice. But if you do not like to write to your mamma, I must."

"No," said Beatrice, firmly; "you look tired; you must have a walk before it gets dark; do go, and I will write to mamma. I will keep the letter open till you come back, and you can tell me if it is right." Then, with one of her sudden impulses, she gave Agatha a rough embrace. "How kind you have been to him—what should we have done without you, Agatha?"

Leaving Beatrice with her father, Agatha hastened away, glad to escape into the open air. The bell was tinkling in St. Mary's tower as she passed it, and she turned in, not now to complain of the length of the prayers, as in old times, but to find in them, and in the whole service, rest and refreshment. As she was leaving the church, Margaret Bromfield came up to her, and asked her to come in to tea. "If

you don't mind, Margaret," was the reply, "I should like a walk better; and if you will come too, it will be so nice. I have been with my uncle all day, and could not leave him before; he has been very weak and ill."

"Ah! I know how trying that close watching is," said Margaret, kindly. "I will come for a walk with pleasure, especially as I shall be able to tell you what I want to tell, better so than over a cup of tea, I dare say. But, Agatha, where are Mrs. Harrison and Victoria; surely they ought to be at home now?"

"Yes. I have not liked to shorten their visit at Shadrington, where it is such enjoyment to Mrs. Harrison to see Eustace and Clara so prosperously settled."

"It is very unfeeling of them, I think," said Margaret, "with your poor uncle so ill here."

"You know," said Agatha, in extenuation, "the kind of illness from which he suffers, goes on for years in some cases; and when Aunt Anna left us three weeks ago, Dr. Hastings assured her Uncle Robert was better."

"Dr. Hastings!" echoed Margaret, contemptuously, "I have no doubt he did."

They turned down the lane towards St. Mary's together, and Margaret then told Agatha

of her engagement to one of her father's curates, and of the satisfaction it gave to every one concerned.

"We shall all live together for the present, at any rate; you know I could not have left the boys and papa. What would they have done without me? And Francis is too unselfish to wish to separate us; but then he is so perfectly unselfish."

Margaret's face glowed with delight as she spoke, and Agatha wondered. In her eyes, the Rev. Francis Sackville was a very dull, ordinary man, with no attraction about him, rather deaf, very slow, and very uninteresting. But, perhaps, it was better for Margaret's energy of character that she should have such a husband, who would not clash with her firm and decided will, and who would trust in her as her father, brothers, and invalid mother had done for so many years.

"If there is time, I should like to go to the Pages' cottage," Agatha said. "Poor little Jessie is always so glad to see me, and I have so little time now."

They walked quickly through the quadrangle of the farm, and down the lane. There seemed an unusual stillness brooding over all things;

two children were coming slowly towards them, and Agatha saw they were the little boy and girl of the farmer who now rented St. Mary's Farm. She smiled at them and nodded, for she had long ago made their acquaintance; and Margaret asked the stereotyped questions, "Have you been to school to-day?" and "How is your mother?"

The elder child took her fingers from her mouth, and, looking up at her questioner, said, "No, we haven't been to school, because Tom has got the fever, and Miss Thompson said we had better not come till he was better."

"Come away, Agatha," said Margaret, in her prompt, decided manner, "all fevers are more or less infectious, and those children may have it too."

As the two girls moved away, the child said something which they did not understand, and they walked on to the Pages' cottage. Here no one was to be seen, and no high-pitched voice of washerwoman or ironer was to be heard; all was quiet and silent. Agatha tapped at the door, and a woman she did not know opened it. Little Jessie was sitting by the fire crying, and when she saw Agatha she exclaimed—

"Oh, mother is so bad! [Johnnie is gone

for the doctor again, and I can't nurse her or take care of her."

"What is the matter with Mrs. Page?" Margaret asked.

"I don't rightly know, ma'am," was the woman's answer. "She has been ailing for days, but wouldn't give in; and this morning when she woke she was not herself, all raving and confused like, and talking like anything. Now she is in a sort of stupid way, and don't seem to notice nothing. I am trying to finish up the week's washing, and looking after her. Johnnie is just gone for the doctor again; he was here this morning, but he didn't say what it was."

"Come away, Agatha," said Margaret, "I do not doubt it is the same fever, that the child has at the farm."

But Agatha could not leave Jessie without a word of comfort, and had already gone into the inner room where Mrs. Page lay. Nothing was to be done there, for she was apparently unconscious, and moaning heavily. She rejoined Margaret almost immediately, and they both left the cottage together. But Agatha turned back to say to Jessie—

"Tell Johnnie to come to Rosina to-morrow,

and let me know how your mother is, Jessie. Don't cry, dear," she added in a whisper, "I hope your mother may soon be better; and you will pray for her, Jessie, I know."

"Oh, that I do, Miss Agatha; but it is so hard to have to sit here and listen to her crying out so, and be no help and no use."

Agatha kissed the child's forehead, and the kiss and the look of true sympathy gave her comfort.

Just by the farm they met Johnnie; he was breathless with running, and in the dim twilight which was deepening would have passed Agatha in his haste without recognizing her.

"Johnnie," she said, "have you got the doctor?"

"Oh! Miss Moore, my mother is so ill," he said, hurriedly. "Have you been to see Jessie?"

"Yes. I am so sorry for you, Johnnie, and I fear I can be of little help. If you want anything for her to-morrow, come and tell me."

"Thank you, miss, indeed; but please don't come near us again till we find out how it is with mother, for it may be the fever, like what they have at the farm, and it's very catching." He took off his cap respectfully, and was gone.

"I am not at all afraid of infection," said Agatha, as Margaret began to express her doubts and misgivings; "and we were not in the Pages' cottage three minutes. It is better not to think about it, for you know, Margaret, it may not be the fever after all."

"I believe it *is* the fever," said Margaret, decidedly; "the symptoms that woman mentioned characterize low typhoid; but, as you say, it is best not to dwell on it."

It was late when Margaret and Agatha parted, but there was light enough to guide Agatha safely to Rosina; to which she walked very quickly, fearing she might have tired Beatrice's patience. At the door a figure stood watching, as she went swiftly up the little sweep of the drive.

"Ah! mademoiselle," exclaimed Louise, as she sprang toward her, in the broken English which she was now rather proud of using, instead of her own pretty musical French; "ah, the poor gentleman, monsieur votre oncle! Monsieur le docteur is with him; he has had another fit—a stroke, n'est ce pas? Ah, ma chère, do not be too sorry."

Agatha waited a moment on the threshold of the door to collect her energies, and, giving her walking things to Louise, she said—

“Is Miss Beatrice with him?”

“No, she was so frightened, she is quite ill herself. Ah! here is the other doctor.”

And as Louise spoke, Dr. Hastings' carriage rolled up to the door, and he stepped out—the surgeon who lived nearest to Rosina having been hastily summoned. In another minute Agatha was standing with Dr. Hastings by her uncle's sofa, for the poor invalid was still in the drawing-room, whence he could not now be removed. She was listening with a pale, calm face to the somewhat involved statement, from the intricate windings of which she gathered that this last attack would probably, most probably, be fatal. Mr. Hall would remain with the patient through the night, and could Dr. Hastings be of any service? Yes, Agatha entrusted to him the sending of the telegram to Shadrington, which must not be delayed, and the copy of which she wrote herself on a sheet of paper.

Dr. Hastings glanced over it, and said, “This is very strongly put, some days may yet elapse before——”

“I think,” said Agatha, “it is always kindest to tell the truth in these cases;” and, with an acquiescent bow and tender pressure of

her hand, the great doctor of Havensmouth left her.

Yes, the stroke had fallen, and through the watching and uncertainty of the three following days, Agatha was the main-spring of all. It was she to whom every one looked—it was she who met the travellers when they arrived—she who stood by the dying bed of him who had protected her in the first days of orphanhood, and from time to time repeated the prayers and hymns which, though he could scarcely articulate a distinct syllable, were evidently a comfort to him. It was Agatha who calmed Beatrice and Victoria, in their frightened grief in this their first experience of a death-bed; it was Agatha to whom Mrs. Harrison turned for comfort, and whom Eustace followed in her gentle ministry of love with admiring eyes.

At last, after four days from the last seizure, the end came. At evening time there was light. Over the face, which had been so expressionless and vacant, a gleam of brightness passed.

Agatha, who was nearest to him on one side, heard him distinctly utter that Name, which is above every Name—that Name which alone suffices for life and for death, and so he passed away!

The last years of a prosperous life had been clouded by worldly loss, and harassed by difficulties unthought of before by that frank, trusting nature; but who shall dare to say that that worldly loss was not gain? Who shall dare to say that in the fading away from his grasp of the things seen and temporal he had not learned to lay hold on those which were unseen and eternal?

For the next few days Agatha bore on her way bravely and well, helping Louise with her heavy work in the mourning preparations, and giving herself up to the comfort of those about her. But she was daily conscious that a languor was creeping over her, and that her powers were giving way. Again and again Eustace had asked her if she were well, and again and again she had answered,

“Yes, I am only tired. I shall rest soon, you know.”

But on the afternoon of that day, when the mortal part of the Squire of Shadrington was borne away to be laid in the old church, where his ancestors had been buried for many generations, Agatha began to feel that something more than fatigue was throwing its spell over her.

"Louise," she said, when Louise came to her room to tell her that madame wanted her, "Louise, I must lie still a little while. I don't think I am well. Tell madame—tell Mrs. Harrison—I will come to her presently, but not now."

Louise looked earnestly at her, and left the room.

"Elle est une ange," she said to herself. "Elle est une ange. Ah, si douce, si bonne;" but Louise stopped Mr. Hall, whom she met on the stairs, coming from Mrs. Harrison's room, and asked him to come and see mademoiselle.

Agatha was sitting up in the bed when he entered the room, and she said, rapidly,

"Mr. Hall, I think I have got a fever. I think I caught it of Mrs. Page. I was in her house the day she was taken ill. Will you please listen to me?" she said, evidently making a painful effort to collect herself. "I think Aunt Anna ought to be told; it may be the fever, and Beatrice and——"

"Yes, yes, my dear young lady, we will tell them when we are sure you have it. We can't tell them before. You have gone through a great deal of late—a great deal—and this is a

natural result. I will send you a composing draught, and you must try to sleep."

As he left the room, Mr. Hall beckoned to Louise to follow him.

"Look here," he said, "you are to say nothing about that woman, Mrs. Page's death (for she died this morning) to this young lady. Say nothing about fever at all, either to her, or to the other ladies. *Comprends vous?*" said poor Mr. Hall, trying to rake up two words of bad French to elucidate his English, and speaking as loudly as is the invariable custom of Englishmen when they address foreigners. "Look here, if it *is* the fever, will you be afraid to nurse Miss Moore?"

"*Que voulez-vous dire, monsieur? Will I be afraid? No, non, certainement!*" said Louise, vehemently.

"Well, then, to-morrow morning, when I find what sort of a night she has passed, I shall be better able to determine what is to be done. Meanwhile say nothing but that your young lady is gone to bed, and stay with her to-night, and prevent, if you can, any other member of the family seeing her. Leave the rest to me to-morrow."

"Yes, I will do as you desire; but, Monsieur

le docteur, I will never quit her, never ! If it is the fièvre, I will tend her, me—I will. Je ne la quitterai jamais.”

And Louise kept her word.

It was a mild February day, a fortnight later, when Roland Bruce walked up to the door of Rosina, and rang the bell, once, twice, three times, and at length an old woman put her head out of the very small crack which she opened, and evidently just awakened from a nap, looked at Mr. Bruce with dim bewildered eyes.

“Is—I want to know——” he began, and then stopped. He found it difficult to frame the question.

“There’s none of the family here,” said the woman, “but the young lady who is dying of the fever. Mrs. Harrison and the Miss Harrisons are at the Marino Hotel, if you please to want them.”

“Who nurses the young lady, Miss Moore ?” he asked, in a strange voice, which sounded as if it came from a long way off.

“The young foreign woman, sir, who was Mrs. Harrison’s maid, and myself. I goes out nursing ; but we are going to have in other help to-night, if she lives till night, that is. We are a’most worn out.”

“Will you let me come in, if you please?” Mr. Bruce said; “and will you ask the French maid, Louise, to come and speak to me when she can leave Miss Moore?”

“It is a very catching fever, sir,” said the nurse, “perhaps——”

But Roland Bruce passed her as she still stood holding the door, and went into the drawing-room. It looked desolate and uninhabited.

As Mr. Bruce waited there he looked around him for some token of Agatha's presence, and on a small table, where a fortnight's dust had gathered, were two or three books he knew. He opened one, and a few dried flowers fell out. They were the flowers Lady Harriet Greville had given her so long ago, preserved in memory of the tender looks and sympathy, coming like a shower, to soften a young heart, which felt bitter in its loneliness and desolation.

He took up the poor withered flowers, and pressed them to his lips, while the blunt word spoken by the nurse came to him with a force which seemed to lay a hand of ice upon his soul —“dying!”—she whom he had known in all the spring and freshness of her young life—dying! with no loving hand but that of poor faithful

Louise to smooth her pillow, and minister to her as she had ministered to others.

“How could they all leave her thus,” he thought; “how could they leave her, to whom she had—as he heard from Margaret Bromfield, whose letter to Mrs. Hope had been the first intimation of Agatha’s danger—acted such a self-denying, self-forgetting part? Leave her alone—and to die—to die like the flowers he held in his hand, with a lingering touch, as if he could not part from them again. Nor did he; he took out his pocket-book, and laid them there between the leaves, and, in spite of the unwelcome thought, that perhaps they were linked in Agatha’s mind with interests in which *he* could have no share, he could not give them up.

Presently the door opened, and Louise, trim and neat, in spite of many nights of watching and nursing, sprang towards him.

“Ah, monsieur! ah, vous êtes venu. Mais il est trop tard.” And then bursting out into her broken English, she said, “The doctor says there is no hope—no hope! she lie still—very still! her eyes shut—but a smile on her face. Will monsieur see her?”

Roland hesitated; and Louise went on,

“Monsieur saved my life for me. Can no

one save her? But she is an angel. Ah, if monsieur could have seen her day by day with that poor gentleman—always kind, always patient—and now madame afraid! afraid of the fever! and running away with the two jeunes demoiselles. Afraid!” And Louise’s eyes flashed, and her lips curled with contempt. “Madame Hope would not have done so. Ah, non! But will not monsieur see her?”

He bowed his head, and followed Louise upstairs to the hushed and darkened room where Agatha lay. It was as Louise said—she lay very still, with a smile upon her lips—lips that were parched with fever; but, like her face, pale and colourless now. The old nurse was there, and looked curiously at the grave, stern man, who gazed silently for a few moments at the still breathing, but scarcely animate form, and then turned away.

In the passage again with Louise, he held out his hand, and said,

“May God bless you for your faithful care of her,” and then he was gone.

He walked with the force of old habit strong upon him to St. Mary’s, down the familiar lane, past the side gate, to the cove. There, hidden amongst the masses of the rocks, he spent

many hours—more than he knew or could count. There, that stedfast, noble heart endured pain which One alone saw, and seeing, pitied, with tender compassion—even as a father pitieth his son.

And comfort came at last, and Roland Bruce retraced his steps in the dim light of the spring evening, as the stars were coming out in the pale blue sky, and a crescent moon hung like a silver bow above St. Mary's; feeling the full meaning of words which fall only as a pleasant song on the ears of multitudes, "Even as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort thee."

He went back to the Marine Hotel, not daring to go to Rosina again to hear the final words spoken, but, as he went up the steps before the door, the waiter said, "Mr. Hall, sir, is waiting to see you."

In another moment he was face to face with the doctor. "You are come, he said, I suppose to tell me——"

"I came," he said, "to communicate to Mrs. Harrison the intelligence that Dr. Hastings and myself have just seen Miss Moore, and we think the crisis is past, and, if she can take nourishment, she may do well."

The revulsion of feeling was almost too much,

but, with his accustomed self restraint, he said, "Indeed; I am most glad to hear you say so."

"I do not say," Mr. Hall continued, "that we are sure yet what will be the issue; but we have hope now—great hope, I may say. To-day, at noon, we thought our patient sinking rapidly," Roland bowed; "I saw your name on a portman-teau in the hall as I went upstairs just now, and remembered, of course, that Miss Moore was a relation of yours, and that my acquaintance with her began at St. Mary's Farm some years ago. I thought it would be interesting to you to hear what I had come to tell to Mrs. and Miss Harrison. They don't know of your being here, I think."

"Probably not. I am tired, and shall not see them this evening." Mr. Hall saw he was not wanted, and, after making a few attempts to enter into other subjects, he departed.

The crisis was past, and Agatha was recalled from the very gates of death, but for many days so feeble was the spark of life, that it seemed as if a breath would be enough to extinguish it. By degrees, however, she began to recover her powers of mind and body, and lay by the window gazing out on the trees and sky, and listening to the sounds of awakening spring with a keen

sense of delight. At last she was able to be taken downstairs, and Louise brightened the long-deserted drawing-room with flowers, which she arranged with taste and skill, and put out on a little table all Agatha's books and work with thoughtful care.

"How shall I ever repay you, Louise," Agatha said one day, as she took a turn up and down the room, leaning on Louise's arm. "You have nursed me with such devotion, I can never forget it."

"It was me who owed you everything—all," said Louise, "and you must not speak so. I have learned all good from you, and I could not thank you enough. C'est impossible. But we must talk cheerful," said the lively little French-woman. "Come, you do not ask who it is that has been all days to ask for you, and brought flowers and fruit himself?"

"Mr. and Miss Bromfield."

"Yes, oui; and Mr. Bromfield, you know, he has been to see you. Madame sends, too, every day, twice, three times, but she dare not *come*, oh no! Then there are many ladies who send, and Miss Cavendish, she wrote to me to ask; but this one, he has been every, every day, will not mademoiselle see him when he comes to-day?"

Agatha's eyes dilated, and a rosy flush settled on her cheek. "Who do you mean, Louise?" she asked in wonder.

"C'est monsieur qui m'a sauvée, Mr. Bruce. He is going back to Scotland; he says he would like to see you first. Ah, his is a great, noble heart, *ah!*" Louise looked unutterable things, and went away to fetch Agatha some arrowroot.

Agatha, when alone, repeated her words aloud, "A great, noble heart." Yes, she knew it, and felt it—did she not owe to him, as Louise said, "All good." For many months past Agatha had felt that in the romance of her youth, and in the restless longing for the world and the things of the world, she had mistaken the seeming for the real, and had turned away from what would have been her prop and stay, her joy and comfort. Were it all to come over again, she had told herself how differently she would act; but it could never come over again, she had thought. She had raised the last barrier between herself and Roland Bruce, on that morning of the shipwreck, when she had met his final appeal so coldly. Since that time he had so entirely and completely changed towards her—his love for her was a thing of the past—his friendship, and his compassion for her in her loneliness;

as far as mere earthly ties went, might be as strong still, but as to the rest, it was over now. And, as the thought passed through her mind, Louise again came in, saying, "Il est arrivé, monsieur est arrivé!" and once more, after an interval of three long years, Roland and Agatha met face to face. She tried to rise to meet him, but she was very weak still, and she was obliged to fall back again in her chair.

"I am very glad to find you so much better," he began, and the calm, composed voice set her more at ease. "I am going back to Glenbarrow to-morrow, and I have been arranging with Johnnie Page to come and make his home at Glenbarrow with poor little Jessie, and I hope it is all settled now."

"Johnnie will like to be with you," she said, faintly. "It is very kind of you."

"I have plenty of work for him there, and Grace will take an interest in Jessie. I suppose you have not been able to see many of your friends yet?"

"Oh, no; I have seen nobody but Mr. Bromfield. Every one is afraid of the fever, you know. Aunt Anna and Beatrice have written very kind notes to me, and sent me fruit, and wine, and all I want; but of course they are

afraid to come. Louise and Mrs. Burt, the old nurse, take great care of me, and Mr. Hall is very kind."

Then there was a pause.

"I must not tire you," he said, "by a long visit; but I shall like to tell Grace I have seen you."

"Give her my love," said Agatha, in a low voice, "and to Shag, too," she added.

He seemed afraid to trust himself to say more, and rose to take leave of her.

"I am very thankful that you are so much better, and I hope we shall have good accounts of you. The most nervous people will surely consider you out of quarantine soon now. Good-bye."

He took the thin white hand in his for a moment, and then moved towards the door, turning to look at her for the last time. The glance that met his was such an imploring and wistful one, as she raised herself to her feet, and seemed to be about to come a step towards him.

"Stop one minute, please," she said. "I want to thank you for coming every day to inquire for me. I want to thank you for the things Louise says you have sent me."

He came up to her again, and stood irresolute ; but those grave earnest eyes sought hers with a look that could not be mistaken.

“Agatha!” it was but one word ; but the whole barrier seemed to break down under its power, as the sound left his lips ; “Agatha, will you come to me now—at last—my darling, will you come ?”

And with all her wonted truthfulness, and all her old child-like impulsive earnestness, she said,

“Oh, yes, yes ! I am so tired—so very tired—and I am *so glad* to come !”

There was no pride now, no foolish thoughts of giving and receiving. The trust she gave was full and complete.

There was no more room for doubt or disquietude ; and thus the bird long on the wing had found its rest.

“I thank God,” were Roland Bruce’s next words. “I thank God, my darling, that you are mine at last !”

Two evenings afterwards, Roland Bruce walked up to his sister, Mrs. Hope, as she stood on the grass before the house at Glenbarrow, watching his approach, with Shag at his side.

“Grace,” he said, “I am going to bring

Agatha Moore to Glenbarrow very soon as my wife. Will you welcome her?"

And Mrs. Hope answered,

"For *your* sake, Roland, I will!"

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

It has been well said that sometimes "We stand serene at sunny points in our lives," and at one of these let us take our farewell of Agatha.

The glowing sunshine of a brilliant September afternoon is lying over the house and village of Glenbarrow. The dark-browed Cheviots are constrained to smile under its influence, and even the antique house, with its heavy stone copings, wears a brighter aspect, so blue is the sky above, so gorgeous the colouring of the trees in their autumn dress, as they flash out by the side of the solemn Scotch firs, which are thickly packed and numerous.

There is a raised terrace walk just under the shadow of a band of these sedate and changeless trees, which is a favourite haunt of the young mistress of Glenbarrow. She loves to hear the dreamy mysterious music in their branches, like

the murmur of far-off seas—she loves to look out on the village clustering round the quaint little kirk and manse, and to see there the signs of prosperity—prosperity which is due to the care and thought of the master of the estate. Here are schools now, and well-built cottages, and small farms, and industry, and contentment. And *once* Agatha knows it was not so. She has heard enough to assure her that before Roland came into possession, the aspect of all things was widely different.

On this particular afternoon she is watching for him, for she knows he will cross the park by a path to her right, and is longing for the first sight of him, that she may hasten to meet him, with Shag, faithful old Shag, at her side. Presently she hears a step coming along the terrace ; but it is not Roland's, and turning, she sees our old friend Elspeth, who has long since allowed that it was a comfort and a blessing that the wee lassie was not blawn awa' by a breath of wind from St. Mary's Farm ; but had come to make her home at Glenbarrow.

"Aye, I was seeking you," said Elsie ; "here's the post-bag just come in, and I ken weel ye like your letters. I am going down to see the lass, Jessie Page ; she is troubled with a deal of

pain, which I think elder-flower tea will soothe. So I took you on my way, as I knew ye would be here watching for the master. Maybe one of the letters is from the dear old mistress."

"Yes, Elspeth," said Agatha, strongly suspecting that interest in the contents of that letter had brought Elspeth to the terrace. "Yes, I will open it. Oh, she is still at Kirkburn Manse, but she will be with us next week. She means to return to Kirkburn, however," Agatha continued, "for she says the poor lady, her husband's cousin, you know, is never likely to be better."

"Aye, aye, she'll be where she is most use, nae doubt. Well, I'll go on my ways now; the dear mistress is well, I hope."

"Oh, yes," Agatha replied, but she was looking at another letter now. "Stop, Elsie, don't forget to ask if Jessie Page wants any more wine; it will do her more good than the elder tea. Ah, there he is!" and she was off "like a hare," as Elsie expressed it, as she watched her.

"Well, it is a comfort to see them so fond of each other, and both walking agreed on the same road. That's the main thing. Who would have thought that pretty creature, with all her

winning ways, would ever have turned into such a good Christian wife. Weel, weel, where beauty goes with real religion, it is so much the better. There's no reason why pretty folks should not be gude."

As Elsie toddled away thus moralizing, Agatha had joined her husband, Shag following with more sedate and measured tread, and the two little terriers, Skye and Dandy, bustling and rolling over each other twenty times on their way.

"It's such a lovely afternoon," she said, "and every thing looks so beautiful. I have been longing for you to come home, that we might enjoy it together. Come to my favourite walk, and let me read you my letters."

He was looking at her with loving and admiring eyes, and as she put her hand into his arm, he bent down and kissed her.

"You seem in tune with the day, Agatha; it is a pleasure to see you look so bright and radiant in these northern regions."

"I was never so well before," she said; "and look how my hair is growing again. I shall soon forget I ever had a fever. But, Roland, I am well because I am so happy. Sometimes I say, Am I *too* happy?"

Her words were like music to his soul, but he only said—

“It is I who often have to ask myself the same question. Now for the letters.”

“One is from Susan Cavendish. Walter’s heart is set on coming to see us with her next summer, after another winter at Havensmouth. There is great joy at Shadrington with the son and heir, who is to be baptized on Sunday. Dear Susan, it is such a nice letter. Will you read it?”

“It is too long; pick out the best part for me,” he said, with a smile, “long letters are not in my line.”

“I know it,” she said, archly, “even when poor authors send you copies of their books in red bindings.”

He laughed, and said, “Go on. I like to hear you read them; that is quite a different matter.”

“One from Grace, which you must read afterwards, it won’t tire you with length.”

He put that in his pocket, and again asked, “What else?”

“A long effusion from poor Aunt Anna, which really I can’t read now; but she seems pleased with Victoria’s engagement to Captain Henley. Beatrice writes in a very different strain about

it. Then here is one from dear Louise ; she is so happy, and Jim Page is such a kind and good husband ; and her little shop on the Strand is so prosperous, and it is all monsieur's bounty and goodness. Dear, good Louise !” Agatha went on, “ what a debt of gratitude I owe her.”

“ Ah !” he said, “ and if yours is great, what must be mine ?”

“ Is it not curious,” she went on, “ that she did not take that fever, which was so infectious ?”

“ No,” he answered, “ one often sees that self-forgetting and self-denying nurses escape, while those who run away from danger are stricken. Ah ! my Agatha, that was a hard trial for me when I found you, as I thought, dying, and saw you sleeping, as I believed, your last sleep, and only the brave-hearted little French-woman with you.”

“ Saw me, Roland.”

“ Yes,” he said, “ I came to look my last, and you smiled, though you did not open your eyes.”

“ Roland, do you know I distinctly dreamed I saw you when I was ill, and I told Louise about it when I was getting better ; but she only said, ‘ Ah ! c'est merveilleux,’ and no more.”

“Because I had charged her to keep my secret; she is indeed faithful and true. And as we are upon confessions, Agatha, I will tell you something else. That day as I waited to see Louise in the drawing-room, I opened a book of yours, and some dried flowers fell out. I put them in my pocket-book, and there they are now. Will you have them back again?” He watched her face almost anxiously as she said—

“Oh, yes, *please*. I did so wonder what had become of them. They were given me in the railway carriage the day I came to Havensmouth, four years ago, by a Lady Harriet Greville, of whom I have heard much since from Walter Cavendish, and who was then so kind to me. She is so good, and sweet, and true, and first led poor Walter to find the only real comfort in his affliction.”

Agatha did not understand the sigh of relief when her husband handed her the flowers from his pocket-book, but it seemed to him as if the last shadow had now passed away. They lingered on the terrace till the sun had sunk behind the hills, talking over many things: of the present, and all their happy, united work together; of the past, and of the future. And

then, as the birds sang their last vespers, they turned in to their home. Under the doorway Roland paused, and, pointing to an inscription in old characters lately cut in the grey stone of the porch, he said—

“Those are true words, my darling; let us trust in them and in Him whose words they are for our future lives. Should He lead us over rough places as now in soft and pleasant paths, still let us remember, in all the changes and chances of this mortal life ‘Dominus custodiat introitum tuum, et exitum tuum.’”

“Yes,” she answered, “from this time forth even for evermore.”

THE END.

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